

Deworming the Reluctant Horse

Are you constantly at battle with your horse over deworming? Find tips to make this common struggle a breeze!

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It's hard to blame a horse for failing to enjoy his deworming paste; it doesn't exactly look like good eats. Although deworming companies have put great effort into making the medicine more palatable, some horses simply haven't read the memo and refuse to have anything to do with dewormers. A horse that is reluctant to take his dewormer can be frustrating—pointing his head skyward as you teeter on your tiptoes, endeavoring to squirt paste into his mouth. Even if you do get that dewormer out of the tube, it seems that more of it ends up on you than in your horse's mouth. If you're ready to put an end to this escapade once and for all, try these deworming tips.

The Old Bait and Switch

Turn a bad experience with deworming around by employing the bait and switch method. Fill an empty deworming tube (cleaned), with applesauce or corn syrup. Place the tube into your horse's interdental space—where the bit normally sits – pointing to the back of his tongue, and press the plunger, releasing the tasty treat into his mouth. Repeat the process daily until your horse happily accepts the applesauce. Now, try it with the dewormer. To keep your horse guessing, occasionally administer your applesauce trick in between dewormings.

Overcoming Fear

If your horse is headshy, then you may have added troubles. "Deworming can be difficult in a headshy horse," says Jenifer Nadeau, DVM, extension specialist from the University of Connecticut. "Be very gentle and work with getting the horse to yield his head to you on days when you have time and do not plan to deworm. Reward any give in your direction. Keep working so that the horse will lower his head for deworming."

Another method you can try comes from equine behaviorist Linda Tellington-Jones. According to Tellington-Jones, the mouth, gums and muzzle are full of acupressure points that work on the limbic system, which is the part of the brain and nervous system that affects emotions. Rubbing the mouth, lips and gums may help your headshy horse overcome this behavior.

Use a Gadget

The Easy Wormer is a nifty dosing gadget that fits on the horse like a bridle. The "bit" has a hollow mouthpiece that allows you to deliver the medication from the outside of the bit. Squeeze the dewormer into the bit mouthpiece, and then leave the Easy Wormer on for a few moments to make sure the horse swallows the entire dose. It also works for other medications.

Taking time to make the deworming process easy for your horse is worth the effort. Soon the job will take moments and you and your horse will be less frustrated. Best of all, you'll be secure in the knowledge that your horse is getting the correct dose of dewormer.