

## Spring Cleaning Around the Barn

**Tackle five major cleanup zones with these tips.**

*By Louann Chaudier*

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Even before the snow melts and the mud dries, horse owners are happily gearing up for warmer weather and solid ground, and are itching to be free of bulky clothes and thick gloves. While waiting out the last gasps of winter, many of us “pony up” to organize the mess we’ve made of our barns during the off-season and begin the tasks that signal spring is about to be sprung.

### Tackling the Barn

Forget robins — spring arrives when you can unplug your bucket heaters and the water doesn’t freeze overnight. To have them ready for next fall, clean the buckets, roll up the safety cords and secure them to the handle, then store each upside down.

Next, remove the stock-tank heater. No doubt, it will be covered with a white, scaly lime crust that would give cement a run for its money. Soak or anchor the metal element in white vinegar or calcium, lime and rust remover to liberate it from the original unit, and store it with the electric buckets. Keeping all seasonal items in one spot eliminates the “now, where did I put the ...” syndrome.

With the heaters in hibernation, you may be left with a pile of extension cords to store. Oh, what a tangled mess we wove with all of them snaking around the floor to run the electric water heaters and infrared lamps. Invest in a few plastic frames to coil up the cords you won’t need during the warmer months; extension cords hung loosely on a hook will invariably tangle like dreadlocks.

Two products terrific for securing almost any coil smaller than a garden hose are plastic cable ties and plastic-coated wire, which is sold by the foot with a self-cutting dispenser. Both are sold by large hardware and home supply merchandisers and farm-oriented retailers.

If you have energy to spare after all the sorting, cleaning and organizing in your barn, consider that time-honored spring tradition — washing windows. Not only will your horses appreciate the better view, but you won’t have to peer through a 30 percent dirt filter to keep an eye on them.

At the same time, eliminate the cobwebs that proliferated over the winter. Even though they sometimes comically veil our horses’ ears, they are unattractive and a fire hazard.

### Hay Storage Cleanup

While most of us start the winter with a sizeable, fairly organized stack of hay, by spring, we’ve created separate piles of good, bad and questionable bales. Try to get an accurate count of the remaining good bales to make sure you have enough to last until the year’s first cutting is baled or pasture can support your horses’ forage needs. Dispose of the rest of your hay to make room for the new crop. Excess good-quality hay can be sold or donated to equine rescue programs, marginal hay can be fed to cattle and goats, and bad hay should be pitched into the burn pile.

If possible, sweep out as much of the hay storage area as you can to eliminate dirt, dust and chaff. You’ll find it easier to stack the new hay if you aren’t wading through a sea of loose timothy and alfalfa. The air quality in your barn will improve as well.

Once the ground can support heavy equipment, you’ll no doubt be anxious to abolish your worst winter buildup — the mountainous manure pile. Considering the primary task for which most horse owners use their tractors, it’s no wonder that the bucket attachment is often referred to as an “end” loader.

Manure is not actually a “waste” product if you consider its immense value as fertilizer, so finding a place to spread it is preferable to merely adding it to a landfill, as many disposal companies are apt to do. If you don’t need it on your own property, perhaps neighbors would be amenable to spreading it on their fields.

Another option that many boarding stables pursue, being used to people and traffic on their properties, is to put up a “free manure” sign to appeal to avid gardeners who fill garbage bags with composted manure and take them away.

#### Getting to the Bottom of the Tack Trunk

Because cold hands and feet are not conducive to meticulous barn-keeping, and the thought of curling up on the couch with a throw blanket and a warm drink is so tempting, many of us end up tossing our tack and miscellaneous supplies in piles to be dealt with “later.” In due course, our tack trunks become a tangle of straps, orphaned gloves, and grungy grooming tools.

There’s no alternative but to roll up our sleeves and get down and dirty. Leather needs to be cleaned and oiled, blankets washed and repaired, hardware polished, boots shined — all tasks that require some elbow grease, yet satisfy our desire to put winter into the past tense and get ready for the first horse show or trail ride.

Sort laundry items out, then either send them out to be washed or sneak them into a laundromat. Customers frown when you bring in mud-covered horse blankets to wash in the very same machines as their pristine towels. Be courteous and clean up after yourself — run an empty cycle if necessary.

Throw out expired medicines and pastes. Inspect your stalls for the normal wear and tear of bored horses confined to their stalls during the worst weather.

Spring is always a good time to think about downsizing the amount of extraneous tack that we were certain we “needed” at some time in the past but never really used. Or we change riding styles and buy new horses, yet hang onto unused tack like family heirlooms. Many horse clubs sponsor used-tack sales where you can lighten your tack trunk load. Of course, you must discipline yourself, so you won’t leave with as much as you arrived with. Another option is to donate items in good condition to horse rescues, therapeutic riding centers or other programs in need.

#### Equipment Tune-Up

When you spot a green haze on your yard and pasture, it’s time to remove snow attachments and tire chains, oil the drive chains, and prepare your tractor for its next incarnation. Mower blades should be sharpened every spring, and all fluids checked and replenished when necessary. If you have oil in your tractor, but it’s black and resembles sludge, drain and replace it. Remember, oil is the life of your engine. [Click here for more on tractor maintenance.](#)

Once the growing season is fully in bloom, you’ll have to deal with hay deliveries. Smart people have their hay delivered and stacked; the rest of us need to make sure our bale elevators are operative. Nothing is more aggravating than having wagonloads of hay ready to unload only to discover a mechanical failure. Test your equipment before you need it.

#### Defuzzing Our Equine Friends

Spring cleaning is not exclusive to our facilities; most of our horses are overdue for some sprucing up as well. When loose hair starts clogging your dandy brush, it’s time to reach for your shedding blade or grooming block, and start scraping. Prepare to be blanketed by a veritable blizzard of hair. (Hint: position yourself upwind of the horse on a breezy day.) Repeat daily, as winter hair removal is a process. Watching beautiful horses emerge from the wooly-mammoth stage is an annual delight.

Before firing up your clippers to remove extraneous winter hair around your horse’s face and legs, make sure your clipper blades are clean, sharp, and lightly oiled. And, because coronet and fetlock hair are the “gutters” to your horse’s legs, don’t remove it until freezing rain and cold mud are things of the past.

To jump-start the show season, yet address this awkward time of year for less-than-perfect grooming, some horse clubs and stables sponsor “Fuzzy-Wuzzy” shows in early spring which may provide just the motivation you need to detail your show saddle, leather tack, and boots.

#### Spiffing Up Your Horse Trailer

Horse trailers need a spring once-over as well, even if they are stored inside. Dirt, leaves, mouse nests, old hay and debris find their way into trailers like stall shavings to a fleece jacket. For wood floor trailers, remove rubber mats and inspect the floor boards for water damage caused by melting snow or leaks.

Check exposed electrical wires for rodent damage, as they seem to find the plastic coating tasty. It’s worth the time and hassle of backing your truck close enough to the trailer to test all electric lights and signals before you actually hook up for your first road trip.

While you're at it, check the inflation of your truck and trailer tires to enhance safety and fuel economy. They have a way of mysteriously flattening just as you're ready to load the first horse, especially if you have friends waiting nearby who are anxious to get on the road.

In addition, while not mechanically imperative, your trailer will be more pleasing to everyone's ears (including your horses') if you oil any old or rusty hinges. Spring is rife with moisture, so anything that can become squeaky does. Various products such as WD40, lithium grease and silicone are available as sprays, and are designed to loosen and lubricate noisy metal connections.

Because spring weather can be capricious — cold and rainy one day, warm and sunny the next — many inclement days can be used productively by cleaning and organizing the equipment, tack, supplies and tools in your barn. Similar to re-booting a computer, you can begin the new riding season with a fresh slate.

Further Reading  
Work Areas in the Barn  
Spring Tune-up  
Spring Checklist

Louann Chaudier recently reserved one space at a used tack sale to sell "a few items," only to realize she could easily have covered two or three tables.

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