

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans, is kneeling on the ground in a grassy field. She is smiling and looking towards a large black and white pinto horse on her left. In the background, two brown horses are standing. The scene is set outdoors with trees in the distance.

WILD + FREE

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF HORSES

BY CAROLYNE STOLZENFELS

When I was a little girl, I dreamed of nothing but owning a horse. I couldn't think of anything else. It was almost as if horses were a part of my DNA before I ever knew it. Fast forward to today, I finally have horses in my life, every single day.

I am a retired Montessori school teacher and reading specialist who felt it was natural to blend my love for children and love for horses with a program for kids.

Horses are not as hard to take care of as you might think. They thrive on attention and enjoy being around people. Most of the time, a little education on how to handle them and work with them can go a long way. Riding is a different story, but you don't have to do any of those things if caring for a special equine friend is what you strive for. There are plenty of horses out there that need homes.






Horses require daily feed and clean water. Unless you have acres and acres of pasture for them to graze on, they most definitely need hay and feed to stay healthy. One of the most important parts of a horse's diet is minerals, like salt and selenium. We live in an area where the soil lacks selenium. Without this essential mineral, horses will have pain in their muscles and have trouble moving their best. So we provide a selenium salt block in all our paddocks and stalls.

Clean, fresh water is also essential. Horses are somewhat picky about their water. I always say to my students, "If you wouldn't drink it, dump it out, clean the bucket, and put fresh water in the bucket."

Handling horses is a lot of fun when you know what you are doing. I teach my students how to quiet their minds and their energy before approaching the horse. Then they learn how to properly put on a halter. Once haltered, the horse comes into the barn for grooming.



Horses and people love the grooming experience. There is something so calming and enjoyable about grooming horses. It is one of the best ways to connect with your horse. Grooming is a process that starts with a stiff brush to remove any dirt and mud, then going to a medium bristled brush to work up the dander and dust in their coats.

The last step is going over the entire animal with a smooth brush to “polish” their coat. They always look so beautiful at the end. Special attention should be given to their hooves, as the old saying goes: “No hoof, no horse.”

Every time we groom, we clean their hooves and inspect the health of their hooves. Sometimes there are little pebbles in the frog of their hoof. This would be very painful for the horse, especially when someone is riding them. Imagine having a rock in your shoe and trying to walk around with that. We also put conditioner on the outside of their hooves so that they do not get too dry.

Depending on what your goals are for your horse, you may tack up and ride, or you may take your horse for a walk just like a dog. Horses enjoy doing different things each time you spend with them. It's important to do different things so that you and your horse do not get bored.

Going for rides is fun, but you don't want your horse to think the only time you want to spend time with them is to put a heavy saddle on them and make them work. After a while, they will look at you differently and may avoid you when you go out to catch them. Giving them time with you on the ground, walking through a meadow, or allowing them to graze just outside the barn is something special. They remember these moments as trusting moments. Building on those times of trust will help you later when you do ride.

After working with your horse in the arena or out on the trail, spend a little time brushing them once more. This ritual gives them a chance to bond even more to you. I believe my horses are so easy to work with because of all the time I spend with them.





Keeping the barn clean and tidy is also an imperative part of taking good care of your horses. Whether you have a beautiful barn with stalls or just a run-in shelter for your horse to go into in bad weather, they must be cleaned to keep flies and parasites away.

Horse manure can be composted and used in gardens and for trees. It makes an excellent fertilizer! Keep in mind that it is one of the safest manures to use for all vegetables and plants because it does not have the same amount of ammonia that other manures have.

Having horses in your life can be an amazing experience. Not only are they fun to be around, but they are also proven to calm a person's energy, help people relax, and give a person a better state of mind once they're finished working with them. I also partner with my horses to help people heal their broken hearts from trauma, loss, and disappointments in life. Horses are truly very special animals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carolyn has been an artist and educator, teaching students for years in a holistic, non-traditional way even as she worked in the public sector. In the beginning, she earned a B.F.A in Painting with a certification to teach Art k-12. She worked as an art teacher for one year and moved into teaching students to read while earning her Master's in Education. She founded a small Montessori pre-school in the mountains of western Maryland called Sacred Meadow Montessori. Since 2006, countless children and families have benefited from such a unique, small preschool. In 2018, her family relocated to Michigan, just outside of Charlevoix, where she currently has a horsemanship program and Equine Gestalt Coaching practice on a small farm called Schön Frieden, which means "beautiful peace."

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