

DeWorming Tips

Taken From Sylvia Scott, Natural Horsemanship Training Center

(Many horsemen, seasoned or beginner, have experienced difficulty in tube worming their horse. Either the horse refuses to allow a tube to be inserted, doesn't want you messing with their mouth or lips or they totally refuse to eat when the wormer is added to the feed. Here is an explanation that, with practice, has worked over and over for me.)

Deworming problems - Take an empty dewormer syringe and fill it with plain apple sauce. Desensitize the horse to the syringe first by rubbing it all over the horse's neck, face while giving him/her a good scratching pleasurably with your fingernails at the same time where you are placing the syringe throughout. Then use advance/retreat as you get close to the lips. Get close to the lips, but pull away (retreat), going back to spots he/she accepted it, before the horse pulls away first. Do that until he/she will accept your rubbing the side of their mouth with it (again, retreat before he/she retreats and you'll get there faster).

Once the horse accepts the syringe rubbing on the side of his/her mouth, contain their head with one hand holding their muzzle (so he/she can't fling their head around) and then squirt the apple sauce into his/her mouth. He/She will be surprised, because he/she's been associating the dewormer with yucky tasting stuff and horses love applesauce! Walk away. Leave the horse on that positive.

By the way.....the best way to squirt anything into a horse's mouth, like dewormer or any oral medicine is:

Have the syringe ready, all prepped and ready for it to be "plunged." I always test first to make sure something's going to

come out when I'm ready so there are no surprises (like forgetting to "unlock"/unscrew the safety clip on most dewormers--and don't forget to take the tiny plastic cap off the end!). Keep the syringe in your left hand and stand on the left side of the horse, facing forward by the horse's head. Reach your right arm underneath the neck area and grab the "nose handle" on the opposite side (the bony ridge across the top of the horse's nose/muzzle) with your right hand, and hold the horse's head steady there. With your left hand, take the syringe and stick it in the crack of the corner of the horse's mouth there, then point it upward (because you are going to want to squirt up into the mouth/base of tongue so that the horse will be sure to swallow it and so it won't just squirt out the other side of the mouth or fall out the bottom or have the horse be spitting it out. High up into their mouth, they can't spit it out. With the syringe, push until the horse loosens the lips and mouth there (there are no teeth there) and when the syringe is well in the mouth, quickly push the syringe plunger, making sure you squirt the entire contents high into the mouth, high up on the tongue. Do this calmly. Remove the syringe, release the head with your right hand that was containing it and you're done. Stroke the horse's neck for reward. Don't make a big deal of it and the horse is less likely to think it's a big deal. After you've squirted the applesauce in the horse's mouth, return the next day and do the exact same routine as above, starting with desensitizing, ending with squirting the applesauce in their mouth again. Walk away on that positive.

Third day, same thing. Very soon he/she's going to start really looking forward to that dewormer syringe with applesauce!! Do this every day for a while and then skip days for a bit, coming back to do the applesauce in syringe routine again, spreading out the days you do this. Then...one day, when he/she's due for the deworming, oops, there's the real dewormer paste in it that day, but the horse won't know that beforehand, he/she'll think it's applesauce coming again! But he/she'll tolerate it now because

you've turned it into a regularly pleasant event. Next day come back and this time it's applesauce again.

Paste deworming, incidentally, should be done every other month.

So that means if you deworm the horse on Jan. 1, you'll do it again next on March 1. Keep track, writing it on your calendar the days you've done it, and which dewormer you gave the horse, and what day your horse is due next. Deworming is very important for your horse's overall good health to kill parasites they pick up via eating hay/grass. And talk to your vet about what dewormer is best for your horse in your region so he can advise which to give him/her at what time of year. Not all dewormers kill the same parasites and the vet will probably advise you how to vary during the year. For example, not all dewormers kill tapeworms, and that's something you're going to probably want to have killed in the fall before they go into winter, to keep their weight up and them the healthiest. But again, get your vet's advice there for the right deworming program for your horse.

Tip: When you go this route for desensitizing your horse to the deworming process, you can also dip the tip of the applesauce-filled syringe in molasses as well if you really want to get her hooked on it happily!

Do this above for a while and before long you won't usually have to go back to the applesauce routine anymore. She will be reprogrammed to tolerate the deworming process from then on.

Incidentally, most deworming problems happen because at some time a horse was forced there to take the dewormer, sometimes roughly. And the problem then ever-escalates. The more they fight it, and the more the human fights them back, guess who loses that battle there? The human! You can't force a horse, a 1,000+ animal to take something into their mouths they don't want to any more than you can force a toddler you can't get green

beans down if they don't want it! And it's not healthy nor recommended to force (in either case!). Most horses if never forced from the beginning, if they trust their human, will take dewormers just fine. It doesn't taste that bad, just has a weird globby consistency to them. But most of the time I see deworming problems, it's because the human got too forceful somewhere along the lines there with the deworming, got in a fight with them, and the horse now associates deworming with some kind of uncomfortable struggle, triggering fear in them. And soonteh horse is associating the taste of the dewormer with a struggle & fear. Oops.

But backing up now, calmly going the applesauce route as described above fixes that problem and gets the horse accepting it calmly, willingly from then on. This route for desensitizing the horse to the deworming process works. Try it, you'll see!