

Punxsutawney Phil
didn't see his shadow this
Groundhog Day:
Get ready for an early spring!

You know you're about to leave the dark days of winter behind when the sun starts to shine, green buds appear, and you're pretty much tired of your horse looking like a yak. Get your grooming tools ready, shed out that coat, and enjoy some dapples and shine!

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

Spring shedding is tied to photoperiod, meaning as days grow longer (and temperatures rise), hormonal changes cue the horse's body to begin dropping its long, thick winter coat.

Keeping the stall lit so your horse receives a cumulative 16 hours of light from both natural sources (outdoors, skylights, windows) and stable lighting systems may prompt shedding. Set a timer so lights function regularly on the same schedule, with the equivalent of a 200 watt bulb per stall. Plan ahead — you should start lighting about two months before you would like your horse to shed.



Brenna Whitlock

Environmental conditions, nutrition, and grooming also play a role in shedding. Blanketed horses stabled in warm, lit barns throughout the winter may show little difference between winter and summer coats. Some believe horses in work shed out in a timelier manner, while those not in work are more likely to hold onto their winter coats.

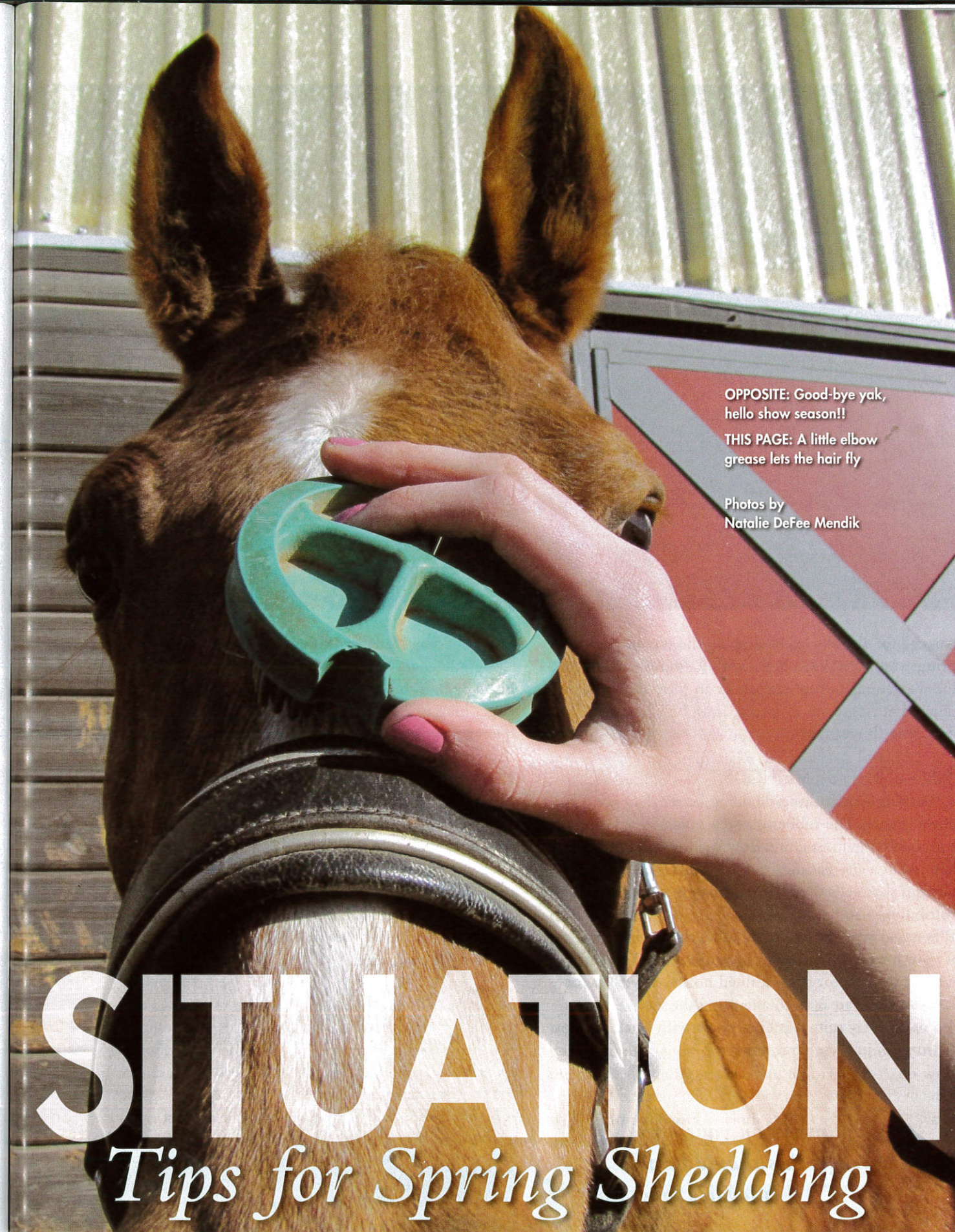
Diets rich in essential fatty acids, including omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids in a 4:1 ratio, provide a lustrous coat,

and some believe aid in the shedding process. Good sources of these nutrients may be found in fresh pasture, ground flaxseed, and rice bran.

Saying good-bye to winter hair is not just aesthetically pleasing; a long coat in warm spring temperatures may cause the horse to overheat on warm days or when working, and may also harbor bacteria. Some circumstances

A HAIRY

BY NATALIE DEFEE MENDIK



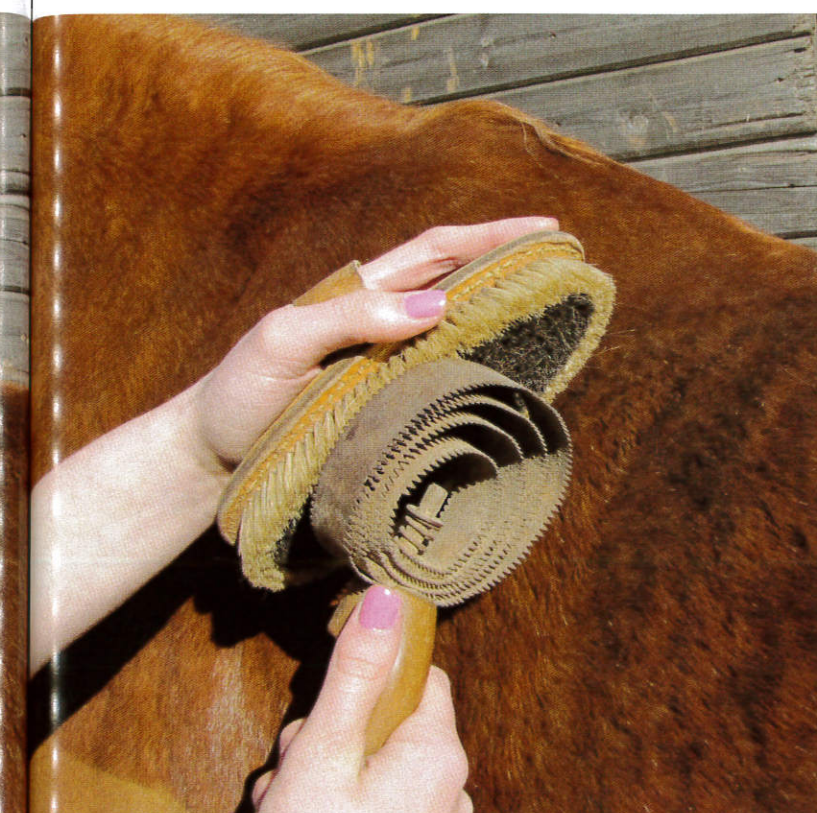
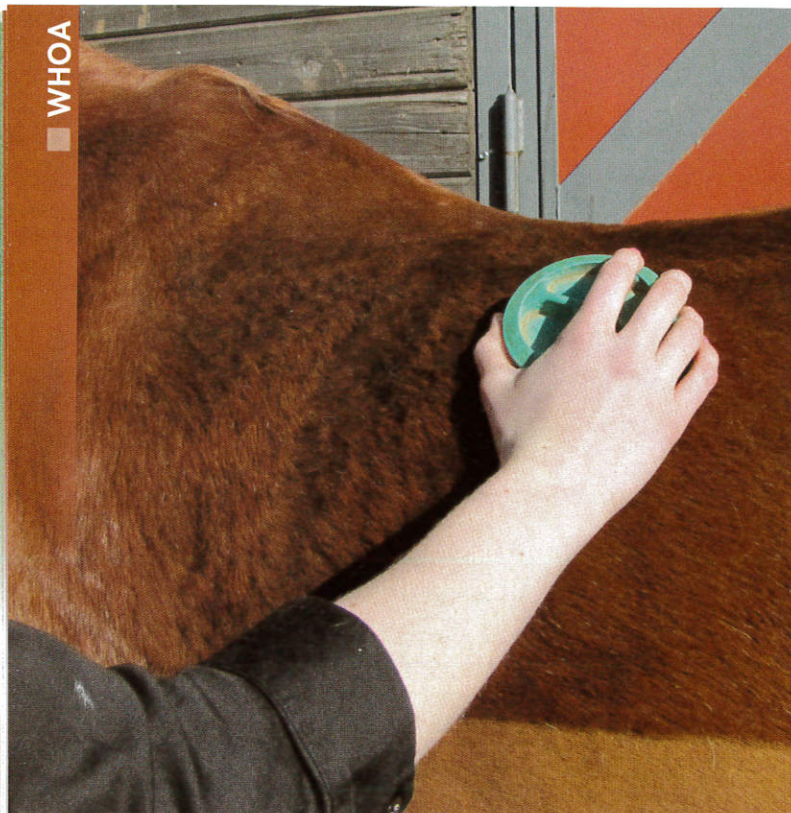
OPPOSITE: Good-bye yak, hello show season!!

THIS PAGE: A little elbow grease lets the hair fly

Photos by
 Natalie DeFee Mendik

SITUATION

Tips for Spring Shedding



may call for actually body clipping the winter coat in spring: a late shedder, a horse with Cushing's disease that doesn't naturally drop its coat, or an early show season. Clipped horses, even in spring, must be blanketed according to weather.

TRIED-AND-TRUE METHODS

Nothing speeds along shedding better than good old elbow grease. The rubber curry, a much-loved stalwart, is probably the most commonly used shedding tool. Applied in a circular motion, the curry loosens dead hair and skin cells while promoting circulation and distributing natural oils. New curries range in size and stiffness, so you can easily find ones that fit in the palm of your hand with either soft or firm nubs. The softer curries are great for thin-skinned horses, as well as for delicate, bony areas, such as around the face. You can also use a curry mitt, a rubber glove with small nubs on the surface, in these same areas.

Keep an eye on your horse's body language; this should be an enjoyable procedure.

A shedding blade, a flexible metal strip with teeth along one edge, loosens ready-to-shed hair. Hold the blade open in both hands, using long strokes on the large, muscular areas along the neck, back, and hind-quarters, avoiding any bony spots. Some also use a Scotch comb, essentially a comb for cows, running along the grain of hair like a shedding blade. Perhaps the best job for a metal curry comb, besides removing caked-on mud, is to have it on hand to clean dirt and hair from brushes.

A pumice stone, like the Slick 'N Easy™, can be used in short, easy strokes on just about any part of the body. Brush accumulated hair and dirt off the stone, and occasionally run the edge of the pumice along stone or concrete to sharpen.

NEWBIES

Since no one likes a hairy horse, there's no end to new tools on the market — some come with a hefty price tag, though fans will likely tell you they are worth it. A few newcomers include the SleekEZ®, a long blade set into a wooden handle; the StripHair™ Gentle Groomer, a grooming block made of soft, rubber material; the FURminator®, a blade with small metal teeth set in a plastic handle, and the Epona® Shed Flower, a rubber curry with small inset metal teeth. A quick look at YouTube tutorials and online reviews can help you

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Today's rubber curry combs come in every size and stiffness, so you're sure to find just the right fit for your hand and your horse's comfort zone.

You may want to give some of the newer tools, like this SleekEZ®, a try. Use a metal curry to regularly clean your brushes while you groom. Long strokes with a metal shedding blade remove loose hair from muscular areas.

BELOW: A special horse vacuum sucks away dirt and hair from a curried horse.

Photos by Natalie DeFee Mendik



decide if you want to stick with the old-fashioned tools or try something new.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Shedding your horse out isn't rocket science, but a few easy tips can help make the process a little less, well...hairy. Unless you enjoy looking like a Yeti, avoid polar fleece and lipstick, both of which all that loose hair will stick to. Your best bet: wear an old shirt you can take off when done, or even better, an old wind-breaker or poncho made of nylon material.

Keep an eye on your horse's body language; this should be an enjoyable procedure. He'll let you know if certain tools are too rough, if you're using too much pressure, or if his skin is getting sore from too much grooming.

If you are among the lucky ones to have access to a horse vacuum, curry or shed your horse and follow up with a good vacuum session. Use small clippers to nix the goat hairs along jawline and fetlock. Finish up with a good grooming with a body brush, wiping the coat with a damp microfiber cloth at the end. So get to work and let the hair fly! 🌿

Natalie DeFee Mendik is an award-winning journalist specializing in equine media. Her personal horse passions include dressage and vaulting. Visit her online at www.MendikMedia.com.