

## **DIY Hoof Trimming**

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A fundamental advantage of barehoof trimming over traditional shoeing of horses is that many people can trim hooves themselves. There are many other advantages of keeping horses barehoof too. But that's a BIG subject and not the purpose of this article. Or just ask anyone who is passionate about barehoof horses; they'll fill you in.

DIY hoof trimming can be a pain in the back or a wonderful experience and everything in between. Your horse may be a sound, free moving, rock crusher or a lame excuse for an equine and everything in between. Just how you and your horse feel about the process known as barefoot, barehoof, shoeless, or whatever it's called in your area, will depend on a few fundamental basics.

The first of these basics is knowledge. It's not up to the horse to bone up on trimming techniques, tools, anatomy, posture, fitness, hoof function, hoof pathologies and dynamics..... Yep, it's up to you.

So where to start? Well perhaps meeting some well-maintained barehoof horses is a good place. Usually the human who comes with these horses can then take you onto the next step. More often than not they will be enthusiastic or even passionate about barehooves and more than willing to induct you into the growing 'barehoof' club. The Australian Equine Barehoof Movement [www.aebm.com.au](http://www.aebm.com.au) is a shining example of this infectious enthusiasm. And while you are on the Internet just google 'bare hoof' or 'natural hoof care' or 'barefoot horses' and we'll come and save you in a week or so. It will take you that long to read all that's out there on this movement away from the shod horse. Be ready to be flooded.

Books too. After I had my horse natural barefoot trimmed, I went away with the name of Pete Ramey written on a piece of paper. Pete has written a very easy to read book called 'Making Natural Hoof Care Work For You'. So I ordered it and now I've read it about seven times (and counting). Even though I'm not a star watcher or autograph hunter, I was lucky enough to get Pete himself to sign my copy when he was out here last year. Then there is Jamie Jackson. For an ex farrier, surprisingly, Jamie uses a few words in his classic 'Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care' that had me reaching for the dictionary. His books are slightly more technical too. But not overly done. Just about all one would need to know to begin the barehoof journey. I can say I have read JJ's book a number of times too. Dr Hiltrud Strasser has also written a no B.S. book called 'A Lifetime of Soundness'. This book should be made mandatory reading for anyone with a horse. It is very good.

Attend a clinic or workshop on barehooves. There are several providers of these informative day or weekend workshops in Australia and many advertise that they will come to your area. Such is the enthusiasm of those in the know. Many horse owners are fascinated with hooves once they are properly introduced to them. Those who are not so passionate may be compromising the health and soundness of their horse. Ignorance is not bliss!

On the quest for hoofcare knowledge, it is really refreshing to know that there is now a nationally accredited TAFE course in Equine Hoof Care. Tasmania is so beautiful and that is one of the advantages of going overseas to do this course. Overseas to Tasmania, that is. Tassie TAFE can be contacted on 1300 655 307. It is a Certificate 111 in Agriculture course and a real qualification for those

serious about barehoof trimming and hoof care. Although this level of knowledge is not required for DIY trimming of your own horses' hooves, if trimming professionally is planned, it is probably a 'must do'.

Having and maintaining the best tools and protective clothing is vitally important to doing a great trim. After you have learnt what to do and why you do it, that is.

Starting with protecting yourself in the harsh world of hoof trimming, consider a trimmers apron or chaps as essential. One nick with a rasp and your Wranglers are wrecked or your Levi's are lacerated. And if your rasp is sharp (as it should be) then hand protection is also vital. Riggers gloves are good; Kevlar gloves are even better. The Kevlar gloves I now use cost \$12 a pair and offer better feel and grip of tools and horse than the leather ones I used to use. These are available from any protective or safety clothing outlet. And while on the protective clothing bandwagon, I have recently begun using wrist guards, aka arm protectors. Anyone hoof trimming without these usually has a collection of scars on this vulnerable part of their anatomy. If a hoof knife slips or a rasp misses its mark, you can be sure that human blood will result. On the surface that may appear to be 'just a little cut or nick' but because you are working in a quite unsanitary environment, your tools are bad bacteria city and serious infection can be the result. See the resources section at the end of this article for supply of these simple but essential forms of body protection.

Of course steel capped boots are almost mandatory for obvious reasons. And no, the steel cap will not bend and trap your toes if a horse stands on your foot.

One other aspect of 'dress' code is comfortable clothing. Girls should consider the implications of loose shirts and blokes beware of displaying the ubiquitous plumbers crack. So dress accordingly. Someone might be holding your horse and be distracted by what they didn't plan to see when you are bending over working hard. Could be good, could be bad, depending on your perspective, I guess.

Tools. Surprisingly, not too much is required here to do a great deal of good for horses' well being and comfort. The minimum tool requirement is a hoof rasp with handle, a loop knife or double-sided hoof knife, a good hoof pick or scraper along with a brush and, of course, a sharpener for your hoof knife. Maintaining them in peak condition is paramount to doing the best job possible. Your rasp needs to be kept cleaned, oiled and dry between trims. Your hoof knife needs to be kept razor sharp with an appropriate diamond impregnated knife sharpener and your hoof pick needs to be bright enough in colour so it doesn't get lost in the grass. Again refer to the resources section at the end for tips on good gear.

Accessories. I use a hoof stand and would suffer without it. When I began trimming, two hooves was enough to make me want to lie down for the rest of the day. Now as I am more physically used to the work (it is demanding on your body, believe it or not) I find with the aid of a hoof stand I can trim ten or so horses a day without overdoing it. Many trimmers do a lot more but that is my natural limit. A hoof stand should be adjustable for different sized horses, be strong and have no 'nasties' such as sharp edges and the like. For Shetlands and minis, I find kneepads and kneeling does the trick. I pray that they behave and they usually do.

How you approach and handle your horse is your business. Doing it politely, calmly, consistently and gently seems to work well for most horses. Greet your horse with respect and reverence. Tell him what you are planning, ask him for his cooperation and remind him that you are helping him to have the best hooves

in the paddock. Picking up the most forward front hoof is usually easier for your horse. Think of the horse as a table layed with crockery and you are planning to take one leg away. The crockery must be repositioned to prevent a crash. Your horse must be given time to rebalance himself when he figures out you would like to pick up a particular leg. Using the chestnuts as a 'pick up button' seems to work well with most horses too. Touch it, hold it then, if required, gently squeeze it and as soon as the hoof pops or swings up, reward the horse by instantly letting the chestnut go and take hold of the hoof. Soon he will realise what you want when the lightest touch is made. No dragging and pulling up on his feathers required.

Often the horse has a hind leg cocked and ready to give by the time you get around to the back end. That's the one to go for. Similarly but differently, use the hock or the tendon above the hock in the same way as you use the chestnut on the front legs. Bingo and up comes the leg. Try to hold the hoof capsule rather than the pastern too. Every now and then trim the hinds first. Variety is the spice of life.

Have a good look at the hooves. Get to know them. Look for anything weird or strange. Hooves are a 'works in progress'. They will be different this month from how they were last month. Check for injuries, greasy heel, growth or laminitic rings, abscesses and bugs. Or really enjoy their perfection and beauty. Take photos and measurements. If the hoof looks 'right', it usually is and if it looks strange then usually there is something out of balance. Take your time trimming and scrutinize your work. Enjoy the intimacy of the process. Tune into your horse. Spend more time observing and checking for balance and when you're done and are putting the hoof down, place it on the ground rather than dropping it. It is much more polite.

Then stand back and admire your handiwork. Well done!

### **Resources:**

Hoof Care Books and Natural Horse Books are available from me at [www.waterfallcreek.com.au](http://www.waterfallcreek.com.au) as well as Star Ridge Publishing [www.star-ridge.com](http://www.star-ridge.com) and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Top quality, practical and fashionable Trimmers Aprons and Wrist Guards can be ordered from Luscious Leather in Victoria. Leonie Quick has taken the best on the market and made them better. I do not know why she produces aprons in vibrant colours with matching wrist guards – she says it's a girly thing. Dull colours are available as well though. see [www.lusciousleather.com.au](http://www.lusciousleather.com.au)

Hoof Knives. Hoof knives are available from farrier supply outlets, horsey shops and agricultural stores (as is all the gear required). You do get what you pay for though. As mentioned before, keeping your hoof knife in razor sharp condition is very important. This can be best achieved with a diamond impregnated sharpener and correct sharpening technique done regularly.

Hoof Rasps are readily available from horsey shops across the country. Trimmers usually have a preferred brand so try and see. A well-maintained rasp will last quite a while but don't battle with a blunt one. The less time you spend under the horse the better horse, trimmer and handler will be. For sourcing the better rasp handles, try O'Dwyers in Kilmore. Keep your rasp dry, clean and oiled. Wrap it in an oily rag between trims and you'll get a lot more trims out of it. When the coarse side seems dull, give it a once over on a rotary wire brush to straighten up the burrs.

Nippers. Although when you trim regularly, hoof nippers or cutters are usually not necessary, they are a great tool to own and to master. Hoof nippers do save rasping too (which seems a contradiction – some trimmers prefer to remove the bulk of material with a rasp and some prefer the nippers). Be prepared to pay around \$150 and more for these. Gasp! It is worth it. Buying a pair of cheapies is false economy. I know! Nippers come in different sizes too. Smaller ones for smaller hands I guess. And never be tempted to use good nippers to pull shoes or nails!

Please don't read this article and think that's all there is to giving your horse barehoof care. Well-known and very experienced trimmers all over the world freely admit that they are still very much in learning mode despite trimming thousands and thousands of horses. But we all gotta start somewhere.

Happy barehoofing!

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