

Natural Parasite Control – Herbs by Mother Nature

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Using chemical worming agents on a regular schedule could be harming your horse, even more than the parasites/worms themselves by compromising his immune system as well as his "natural digestive defenses" against them. Frequent chemical worming can even be contributing to new invasions of parasites by altering his intestinal environment.

It is true that internal parasites can be silent killers, which may cause internal damage if not controlled. They can lower your horse's resistance by robbing him of valuable nutrients, which would normally be used to maintain his immune system at healthy levels.

In some cases a parasitic infestation may even cause gastrointestinal irritations such as non-specific colic or colic like symptoms, ulcers or ulcer like sores.

However, the question begs to be asked: When did we all seem to buy into the frequent paste worming protocol without first questioning whether or not our horse actually had a parasite problem?



Who was it that convinced us that our horses really needed a paste wormer on a 6-8 week basis all year long? How often have we/you/me really checked the parasite load before giving a chemical wormer?

Proactive Rather Than Reactive Approach

Since many parasites are primarily transferred through manure from an infected horse and ingested while feeding, using a ground level feeder along with cleaning stalls, corrals, and even pastures at least once per day is just one part of a pro-active parasite management plan.

Many of my customers are ask-

ing for a non-chemical, alternative way to either prevent a parasitic infestation or to treat their horses for suspected parasitic problems; so that they are not compromising their horse's immune and digestive systems with a toxic daily wormer or using a paste wormer an every 4 to 8 weeks.

I was raised with alternative medicine and practice it with my own animals. Having said that, there may be a time and a place for "traditional chemical wormers" in any alternative program if the need arises. However, I am not suggesting that they be given in the "traditional" and suggested manner and instead depends on the health & age of the horse, if there is a medium to high egg count or obvious signs, and how your stable management program is run.

Immune System is the Key

The horse's immune system holds the key to his body's health; it protects the horse's body against viruses, bacteria, fungi, parasites, etc. It is a miraculous and complex network of organs that contain cells that recognize & destroy foreign invaders and those cells are nourished by his ability to uptake all of the necessary nutrients from his feedstuffs. Good horse nutrition is the key.

Some horses, because of age, chronic infection, poor nutrition, stress, over vaccination, over use of chemical wormers, or over exposure to environmental toxins

(chemical fly sprays, insecticides and pesticides on their hay) have a compromised immune system, usually resulting from a compromised digestive system which leaves them more susceptible to parasitic infestations, viruses and other infections.

The most common sources of digestive disturbances in horses are caused by stress, which may be brought on by: sudden changes, unseasonable weather conditions, moving, competition, training, psychological stress of travel & showing, chemical worming, parasitic infestations, vaccines, viruses & antibiotics; breeding, mares in foal, foaling, and weaning (both mare and foal). Stress can also be created by alterations of weather, environment, feeds and water. Although the effects may not show up immediately, a horse's beneficial intestinal bacteria can be destroyed or depleted during these times. Without the beneficial intestinal bacteria, food passes through the system and is not "fermented" in the way it was intended. This partially undigested food passing through the gastro-intestinal tract may then lead to situations such as colic, bloat, founder or increases the possibility of developing feed related allergic conditions.

Gut Bacteria; Foe or Friend

There are three kinds of "gut bacteria"; good, neutral & bad and the horse needs a balance. As long as the balance of "good & bad" bacteria remains constant and the gastro-intestinal tract is stable, the horse re-

mains healthy. When the balance is upset, parasites then gain entry and can move right in to set up house-keeping. The horse will eat but may not be able to digest properly or assimilate the nutrients he needs from his food to maintain a healthy immune system. The intestinal flora becomes compromised and instead of being able to maintain a hostile environment to parasites, it then becomes a welcoming one. It may begin to show up as a dull coat, skin conditions, inability to maintain weight, slow foot growth or other medical conditions including diarrhea.

Supplementing your horse with an equine friendly "blend" of probiotics provides an excellent way of limiting the number of harmful bacteria, parasitic infestations and pathogens in the digestive system, thereby limiting their effects on the horse's overall health and well-being. All horses benefit from a well-balanced, concentrated, probiotics/digestive enzyme supplement added to their daily feed ration because they all share common "stress" factors.

Horse specific digestive enzymes coupled with the probiotic supplementation found in the Earth Song Ranch "Equine-Zyme" is one way of encouraging the proliferation of certain "good" (beneficial) bacteria to keep the bad in check and work in concert with the digestive process. When fed on a regular basis it helps to create a hostile gut environment for parasites. A daily 10gram scoop of Equine-Zyme along with a once monthly Herbal Wormer is an efficient parasite prevention program

which not only boosts your horse's immune system by providing him with organic minerals, garlic and other nutrient rich ingredients, it also provides him the ability to increase the bio-available nutrient absorption from his daily feed rations.

The Power of Nature

There are a variety of seeds and herbs that when blended together and given for five days monthly, preferably during a full moon cycle, will not only help to expel any parasites the horse may have picked up, but will also assist in destroying most parasites. I have also found that if you also feed a concentrated garlic powder, beginning in early spring along with the Equine-Zyme, it gives the effect of not only being anti-parasitic but can also help repel flying insects. There are a number of "Anathematic herbs" which fall into different categories; some herbs may have several classes of action in the body and some have a combination of the following properties:

Vermicides- Kill worms in the gut or elsewhere

Vermifuges- Expel the dead worms and any associated debris from the body

The difference between expelling and actual killing the parasites can depend on the herb used, dosage given and how often it is administered. Anathematic herbs can be very toxic in nature and should not be randomly used nor fed to any animal or person unless properly mixed and prepared by a qualified

herbalist or vet doing alternative practice. Herbal products meant for human should not be used on your horses, as most contain Black Walnut which is very toxic and can be lethal to your horse.

Some of the vermicide and vermifuge type herbs that are found in the Earth Song Ranch Herbal

Wormer are:

Wormwood: Is one of the most bitter herbs and is best used as a part of a natural worming mixture. It is used not only against threadworms but also round worms. Wormwood is an excellent Anthelmintic and also an effective tonic for the whole digestive system.

Fennel Seed: Is a liver herb which works to help balance horses with either poor or voracious appetites. It is historically used as a part of an herbal worming mixture, as some parasites are known to reside in the liver.

Cayenne: Helps to set up a hostile environment for parasites.

Pumpkin Seeds: Are noted for expelling tapeworms from the body. Pumpkins seeds are rich in nutrients which can assist in removing large quantities of uric acid in the urine. They also contain an amino acid-cucurbitin giving these seeds their anthelmintic actions.

Garlic: Garlic is a natural antibiotic. It is anti-microbial, anti-parasitic, anti-fungal, and anti-bacterial. Garlic is useful against round worms, tapeworms, pinworms, and hookworms.

Thyme: Contains anthelmintic properties and is ideal for digestive complaints, including colic.

Hyssop: This herb's therapeutic actions are due to its natural essential oil which has anthelmintic properties.

Blue Vervain: Is used to help strengthen and restore the nervous system, particularly after an illness or for any liver complaints which might be caused by parasites.

Red Clover: Red Clover is high in Copper and Cobalt and is considered to be anti-fungal, anti-viral herb, and may have anti-parasitic properties. It has been shown to be effective against red-worms also known as bloodworms or large Strongyles.

Olive Leaf: Research and clinical experience to date is showing that it may be beneficial in the treatment for conditions caused by or associated with, a virus, retrovirus, bacterium, or protozoan (It is also a useful herb in the treatment of EPM).

Green Stevia: Is a natural sweetener and has premium soluble fiber that selectively nourishes the friendly bacteria (lactobacillus and bifidobacteria) in the intestines. Along with added Beta Glucan 1,3 1,6: Virucidal, fungicidal, bacterial-cidal.

However, it is not good enough to just feed an herbal wormer on a

monthly basis, as a preventative approach is also necessary including fecal exams and a good stable & ranch management plan to help prevent a parasitic infestation in taking place.

Fecal tests, preferably a quantitative (demonstrates a specific count in eggs per gram) rather than qualitative (simply shows the presence or absence of eggs), can be done on a regular basis to see if your horse does or is beginning to have a parasite load. You can do it yourself with a \$50 microscope, a McMaster slide and some instruction from your vet on what to look for. Or your local vet may do fecal tests for you. My personal goal this year is to buy a microscope to do fecal tests on my own horses so there is no guesswork about using a chemical wormer.

Good preventative management practices should also include the following:

If possible, rotate animals on pastures, allowing other grazing animals such as goats, sheep, lamas, or other farm animals to graze them, thereby interrupting the life cycle of the parasites.

Maintain a flock of free-range chickens which assist in natural control of parasites, eggs, and fly larva, and have the benefit of giving back natural tasting eggs.

Group horses by age to reduce exposure to certain parasites and maximize the de-worming programs for susceptible animals, i.e. foals,

weanlings and yearlings.

Keep the number of horses per acre to a minimum to prevent overgrazing and fecal contamination of the pasture.

Use a large ground feeder for hay and grain rather than feeding on the ground.

Remove bot eggs quickly and regularly from the horse's hair coat and use a good natural fly spray particularly on the horse's legs.

Use an Herbal wormer monthly for several days during a full moon cycle, to ensure that the horse's immune system is maintained and balanced. Supplement with Equine-Zyme on a regular basis.

Perform fecal exams, preferably quantitative, 3-4 times per year on all horses to determine parasitic infestations loads. Chemically worm only if there is an indication of high egg counts and consider using Ivermecterin once, followed by an Herbal Wormer to prevent re-infestation.

In my particular case, my horses are at home, fed premium hays grown in No. California, with no pesticides or herbicides; their stalls, round pen, and turn outs are cleaned twice per day. They are fed 20 grams of Equine-Zyme, receive Beta Glucan, Kelp and Colostrum in their grain rations daily.

I also give them a blend of other herbs, some of which are consid-

ered to be "Portmanteau" herbs, meaning they have naturally occurring properties or active ingredients that can do more than one thing when all their parts are used together (leaves, stems & roots), i.e. one part may be immune boosting while another part may be anti-parasitic at the same time. My horses are only given a chemical wormer (Ivermecterin) maybe once per year, usually in the fall once the weather starts to turn a little cooler. Prior to this they receive an herbal wormer for five days, during the full moon cycle.

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Fecal Testing Services

We are now offering quantitative fecal testing for our clients to help you better determine your horse's deworming needs. Periodic testing can help determine whether your horse has a low, medium, or high egg count on a consistent basis. This helps decisions such as whether any worming is necessary (don't worm unless there is a problem), the frequency of treatment (whether natural or chemical), and can also help gauge efficiency of your worming program or product (testing before and after using a wormer and looking for significant drops in eggs). Absence of ova, especially after only a single test does not mean your horse is parasite free.

We use the quantitative method using a modified McMaster slide technique and a powerful microscope. Quantitative demonstrates a specific count (eggs per gram) and allows us to look at hard numbers and track any changes. This is opposed to the basic floatation technique used by most vet offices which is qualitative (simply shows the presence or absence of eggs).

Remember, we are striving for a consistent low egg count, not a completely worm-free horse. **There is no such thing.** Remember, just because a horse may be getting chemically dewormed every 6-8 weeks doesn't mean it is effective. In fact, there is wide-spread resistance to many of the chemical dewormers (The Horse magazine, Sept 2004, 'Resistant Worms').

The best defense against high egg counts are a healthy immune system, proper nutrition & body mineral balance, and good stable keeping. We are fortunate in Arizona as our environment (dry and hot) is not conducive to high parasite viability.

See back page for fees, collecting information, and sign-up form.

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Promoting Natural Horse Care Through Knowledge
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Our fee for the quantitative fecal test is \$15 per horse or \$12 each for three or more horses. Kenny can pick-up the sample when he's out to trim (if applicable). We will need 2 fecal balls uncontaminated with dirt, collected fresh and stored in the refrigerator for up to two days (we prefer samples collected the same day as pick-up). A zip lock bag is handy for samples.

A consistent testing schedule, every 2-4 months, will render more comparable results. If results are to gauge efficiency of a wormer product, testing should be done prior to and 10-14 days after administration. We will reduce our fees for this to \$12.00 per test.

Turn around time for results is approx 48 hours.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Enclosed is \$ _____, payable to **If Your Horse Could Talk**

Horses name _____
