

OILING & SULFURING THE FEATHERED HORSE

Many times I've noticed posts on Bulletin Boards from people wanting to know what Oiling & Sulfuring is with feathered breeds. When one does a search online for help...not much comes up. The few explanations (or recipes) that I've found that come up on actual websites (and not just the replies for that question asked on a bulletin board) was one where it is explained to add 2TBS of Sulfur acquired from Gardening Centers or local drug stores mixing it well in a quart of Mineral Oil then squirting it onto the feathers and rubbing in...with a statement to Not use more than 2 TBS of Sulfur as you could burn your horses skin. This is exactly why (just like it has been told to me) I tell others when asked about Oiling & Sulfuring to make sure that they acquire Sulfur that is processed for animal use and to Not use sulfur that is processed for gardening and other applications. The Sulfur processed for animal use is safe to use on your feathered horse and to my knowledge (through using on my own horses and from what others have told me) I've never heard or seen the Sulfur processed for animal use burn the skin of a horse. {You order Animal grade Sulfur from your feed store } Because the Feathered Horse has abundant feather on their legs (unlike light breeds)...there are certain cares one needs to take in maintaining the health and beauty of them that many do not realize. One of these "cares" for the Feathered Horse is prevention of scratches (which seems to be more prevalent in the feathered breeds). Any search online for what scratches is will turn up definitions explaining the signs and stages of it. Although Researchers have not identified the cause of this disease, there are methods and "recipes" for prevention. Oiling & Sulfuring is one method for preventing scratches that has been passed along by the "old timers" involved in feathered breeds. The theory is that the Sulfur creates an environment that prevents growth of the bacteria or fungus that possibly cause scratches. The Mineral Oil acts as an agent to apply and keep the sulfur on the legs of the horse. The Mineral Oil also helps keep the feathers soft and silky, keeping the feather from becoming dry and brittle & helping to prevent "mud burn" or breakage of feather. One day while I was applying the Oil / Sulfur mix on my horses...I thought about taking pictures of the process and decided that I needed a page on my website explaining the process. So below you will find a process of how to Oil & Sulfur a feathered horse – illustrated with pictures. This process was explained to me by a long time breeder of heavily feathered breeds when I first got into Feathered breeds. I hope that this will help others who are either just getting into ownership of the feathered breeds or just wishing to expand their horse knowledge. Enjoy!



{Side note to Oiling & Sulfuring: To make this task easier...make sure your horse is trained to hold their feet still while you work on their feathers. One way that I trained mine is to have a cue for them for when I want them to pick up there feet. With the front legs...it's a squeeze of the chestnut and with the rear it's a squeeze of their "hock cap". A verbal "Foot" is also given when I want their foot lifted. Otherwise a verbal "Stand" is given when I want to work on their feathers without them moving their feet around ...like when I need to Oil & Sulfur them. It makes everything much easier if your horse is trained to stand still when you want them to. }

WARNING NOTE: Some horses may have allergies to sulfur. Do a spot check to see if any reactions to the sulfur occur before you oil & sulfur fully and/or discuss Oiling & Sulfuring your horse with your Vet first. (It was brought to my attention recently of one situation where the owner oiled & sulfured their horse and the horse's legs swelled up in reaction to the sulfur. Many horse medications contain sulfur...and the owner's Vet told them that they were actually lucky to have found out that their horse was allergic to sulfur this way instead of from a prescribed medicine. I want to thank that person for contacting me and letting me know of what happened so that I could put up the information they found out on this page to help ensure all our horses wellbeing. If anyone else has any experiences with oiling & sulfuring where they feel a word of caution needs attention....please feel free to email me them and I'll gladly put them up for all to read.)

On this page I have put together pictures and instructions on how to Oil & Sulfur your Feathered Horse with help from Chivalry's Sir Orrick (pictured above as a 2 yr old with one of his trainers just after he was Oiled & Sulfured). During the "wetter" seasons is when you want to Oil & Sulfur your horses. Depending on your geographical location....You can develop your own schedule with when & how often you Oil & Sulfur. I personally like to Oil & Sulfur at least once a month in the Winter (starting the routine after Show Season has ended)once a week during "mud season" and then back it off to once every two weeks. A Month before Show season I quit Oiling & Sulfuring. For Draft Horse Shows this usually starts around Aug. With Drafts being used more as Riding horses... Show season could start as early as May in the Northeast for you.

Things you will need to get. (if you can't find them in horse supply catalogs or tack shops...ask the owner of your local feed store if they can order it for you.)

- ~Mineral Oil (Animal Grade)*
- ~ Rubber gloves*
- ~ Sulfur (Animal Grade)*
- ~Mixing spoon*
- ~ scoop*
- ~ Bucket or container larger than two gallons.*



< Mineral Oil : Make sure you get Mineral Oil that IS SAFE to use on Animals. DO NOT get any other kind of mineral oil such as from a Paint supply store or Auto store. Any Mineral Oil you get should be labeled like the one pictured here stating it is for use on animals. (Click on the thumbnail to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< Rubber Gloves : You should wear Rubber Gloves while working with and mixing the sulfur. I like to use disposable ones like pictured here because it saves time on clean up. When you're done...you just take them off and throw them away. Buying large quantity boxes at your drug store is usually pretty cheap. Cleaning the Mineral oil & Sulfur off of the "Kitchen" type reusable rubber gloves is a big pain and time consuming. (Click on the thumbnail to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< Sulfur : ABSOLUTELY Make sure you get Sulfur that IS SAFE to use on Animals. DO NOT get any other kind of Sulfur such as from a Gardening Store. Sulfur that is sold for Gardening is not safe to use on animals. It even states that right on their bags. Any Sulfur you get should be labeled like the one pictured here stating it is for use on animals. Your local feed store or Cow supply Company can order this for you. It comes in 50 lbs bags and will probably be priced around \$25 dollars. After I've opened the sulfur bag... I like to keep it in a thick garbage bag so that it's easy to close up and helps keep the sulfur in the bags & is not easily spilled. Store it in a Safe dry place where children & animals can not get into it. (Click on the thumbnail to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< Large Mixing Container : You can use a bucket or as pictured here...a large container that has a hole cut in the top. I just cut a large hole in the top of the container my Soy Oil comes in. These large Oil containers are sold by restaurant supply companies and are about the size of a 5 gallon container. Just make sure what ever container you use is larger than a two gallon container , preferably a 3 to 4 gallon container so it will hold the mix of a gallon of mineral oil and the amount of Sulfur to make a milkshake consistency. (Click on the thumbnail to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< Make sure you have a very well ventilated area to set up everything in and work in when preparing your mix. I like to mix the Oil & Sulfur outside. You can lay plastic down or newspapers under your container so that any spills are easy to clean up. (Click on the thumbnail to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< Once again....Make sure you have a very well ventilated area ... (outside is the best...just make sure you're in an area where the wind won't blown sulfur into your face. Don't breath in any sulfur dust and make sure you don't get any in your eyes while mixing it into the mineral oil. Prepare and apply sulfur mix in a safe area. Keep it away from children and as with anything...be aware of those around you).



Pour One Gallon of Mineral Oil into your mixing container and begin putting Sulfur into the Mineral Oil. (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< Continue to add Sulfur into the Mineral Oil (stir and break up any large lumps with your spoon) until your mix is the consistency of a milkshake. You don't want it to be too runny...you want it thick but not too thick. Once you have it to the consistency of a good milkshake... you're ready to go apply it to the feather on your horse.



Don't worry if there are some lumps still in the mix...you can squish and mix in those lumps as you grab out the mixture to apply on your horse as you go along (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).

Make sure your horse's feather is clean, dry & free of tangles. Your horse doesn't necessarily have to be "sparkling" clean to Oil & Sulfur. Your horse's feather should be Clean (not covered in mud or dried mud) Feathers should be Dry (don't Oil & Sulfur wet feather) I've heard that slightly damp is okay to Oil & Sulfur though. Feathers should be Free of Tangles (brushed out, no tangles or burrs) .



< Scooping out a handful of the Oil / Sulfur mix spread it on your horse's legs starting at the knees / hocks and spread it down the leg. Make sure you massage it or rub it in so that the Oil / Sulfur mix penetrates to the skin. I've found that the horses usually enjoy the leg massage as you rub the mix in.



< This picture shows you the consistency of the mix. Just thick enough so that it doesn't run down the leg all watery like and yet liquid enough to massage into the hair so that it penetrates in to the skin. (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< Continue to apply the Oil / Sulfur mix to the legs...



< massaging it into the hair and making sure it penetrates to the skin. {Side note: If you want to keep the tail hairs away from the rear legs as you apply the Mix...braid the tail up or put it in a tail bag.}



< After making sure that the Oil / Sulfur mix gets to the skin....coat the long feather all the way to the ends with the Oil / Sulfur mix. (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



<This picture shows how the feather is ruffled up because of the massaging and rubbing in of the Oil / Sulfur Mix.



*Oil / Sulfur all four legs from the knees/hocks down Paying Special attention to the back bottom part of the fetlock/pastern area. This is were Scratches usually begin... To prevent scratches from starting
< MAKE SURE YOU GET A GOOD AMOUNT OF THE OIL / SULFUR MIX DEEP IN TO THE SKIN OF THE BACK OF THE FETLOCK & DOWN TO THE HOOF BULB. Saturate the feathers to the skin here especially in the area of the back of the pastern bones and hoof bulb area.*



< One gallon of Mineral Oil mixed with enough Sulfur to make it the consistency of a milkshake will be enough to do all four legs on a well feathered horse. As you can see ...Sir Orrick's legs are well saturated with just using one gallon of Mineral Oil mixed with Sulfur. (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



< If your horse has less feather than this...you could probably get away with not using a whole gallon of Mineral Oil to complete all four legs. If your horse has more feather ...you'll probably need a bit more than a gallon of Mineral Oil. (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).



<This is what your horse's legs/feather will look like after walking around a bit. Your horse's feather (depending on where your horse is turned out) may look like it's collecting dirt or "staining". I've heard many a times people tell me the Oil attracts dirt and debris to the feather and stains your horse's feather. Well...although dirt does get on your horse's feather after you've applied the Oil & Sulfur.... I have never had any problems with stains on my horses. The Oil seems to form a barrier around the hair shafts and keeps dirt and such from staining the feather. My only experience has been that my horse's feather turns out a brilliant, sparkling white when cleaned and washed up. From personal experience I'd say you don't have to worry because the Mineral oil makes it so that the dirt does not stain the feather and when you do wash your horse (which I personally wouldn't do for at least 4 to 5 days after applying the Oil/Sulfur mix) their feather will be sparkling white. (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page). On a side note: Check with your Barn Owner/Manager if you board your horse at someone else's facility. This is sulfur...it does "smell funny". It also drips from the feather as your horse moves in their turnout/stall. Out of respect to the Barn Owner where your horse is boarded ...you should discuss Oiling & Sulfuring with the Owner/Manager about the area you do this in.





*~Cleaning yourself up after Oiling & Sulfuring~
Cleaning up afterwards doesn't have to be a hassle.
Although I always make sure that I wear clothes that don't really matter when doing this job of Oiling & Sulfuring.... I've never had any issues with "stains" coming out of my clothes in the wash. I did however, for a time, have issues with trying to wash off the Oil & Sulfur that I happened to get on my skin....(which will probably happen). I used to use regular dish soap in trying to wash off any Oil & Sulfur that got on my wrists and arms and found that it was quite difficult. The Mineral Oil seemed to resist being cleaned off with just dish soap. Luckily....my husband suggested using a product that is well know with mechanics.... Gojo (pictured at right)> (or a lava soap used to get motor oil and grease off of mechanics hands) . This product easily removes what ever Oil & Sulfur that you do happen to get on your skin. I would highly recomend getting Gojo for wash up afterwards. It makes things just sooo much easier. (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).*



*Preventing scratches from developing on your Feathered Horse means you need to catch even the smallest sign that your horse may be developing them. Check the skin under your horse's feather frequently!
During the "wetter"seasons or if your horse is exposed to wet or damp conditions often and for long periods of time in there turnouts...is when you should keep your horses Oiled & Sulfured ...however there are times when you won't be Oiling and Sulfuring.
(Like Show Season)
<I've found that this product.... (Click on the thumbnails to view a larger picture then use your back button to get back to this page).
<Ekyss MicroTek Equine Spray really works great! If I ever feel even just the smallest bump or "scab" on my horses...I spray this on the spot and it heals the area. I don't use this product with the Oil & Sulfur. The only time I've ever applied this was when my horses feathers were clean and not Oiled & Sulfured. This product is great to keep handy during Show Season when you don't want to be Oiling & Sulfuring your horse.*