

Sweeping Your Troubles Away:

By: Cliff Kelsey

A valuable tool for sweeping your troubles away is a simple Corn Broom. It can cure trouble with foals and adult horses too.

If you “imprint train” your foals from birth, keep regularly touching them all parts of their anatomy, and picking up their feet, you may not need this “corn broom cure”.

On the other hand, if a busy life has left you with a foal that does not like to be touched in certain spots, this article identifies a cure. If you purchased a weanling or older horse that was not handled much and is “jumpy” about being touched, this article can help.

This article also shares some useful training suggestions to reduce risk when your horses are out impressing the public.

The objective is to get our horses to be very calm and accepting of human touch on all parts of their anatomy. That includes fingers in all orifices in preparation for future Veterinarian care. If they can be safely touched anywhere, that will make all future training much easier and safer for harnessing for driving, riding and farrier care.

Another objective is to reduce the risks that some member of the public or visitor to your farm may do something foolish and get kicked or cause some other form of disaster. That requires training them to not over-react to being unexpectedly touched by unfamiliar objects.

The over-arching benefit is building trust within your horse that you will not intentionally harm them, and you are their trusted leader. Building that trust is important. That trust will allow you to introduce your horse to a foreign situation and discover they will attempt to do as you want, because they trust you as their leader.

Usually, once you have built that trust, it can stay with them for life, unless someone does something foolish to shatter that trust.

We have successfully used this “Corn Broom Cure” on our Shire herd, when necessary, for several decades. Thankfully most hardware stores still sell Corn Brooms. Over time, they may get harder to find. Purchasing and storing a few may prove you wise.

We normally “imprint train” our foals from birth and can touch them anywhere and pick up their feet with ease during the first week or two. Several good books are available on the subject of “imprint training” foals.

However, foals can forget fast. There can be periods due to other priorities, like haying season or when building horse facilities, during which we may not get our hands onto a foal for a month or more, while they run with their dam and a pasture breeding stallion. In that situation, foals may become nervous about being touched in certain areas of their body. Fortunately, the Corn Broom comes to our rescue.

To utilize the Corn Broom cure, you first need a horse that is halter-trained and trained to tie up calmly to a strong secure post. We place a halter on them during the first 2 or 3 days old



Starcastle Giesha @ 4days, in a halter.

and teach them to tie-up to a post within the first week. We train them to lead on halter during the first few weeks of their life.



A key advantage of the Corn Broom is the long wooden handle, which can keep you at a safe distance. Even foals less than a week old can instinctively kick you before you see it coming. There is risk of serious injury. So, a calm, cautious and self-

assured approach by the trainer is essential.

The Corn Broom acts as an extension to your arms to keep you at a safe distance. The nervous horse may kick at and strike the broom without injury to you or the horse.

Regardless of how viciously or softly they kick at the Broom, the process must continue until they realize the broom will not harm them and stop kicking. With a brief session each day may take them 2 or 3 days before they submit to their fate. A few quick learners will catch on in the first session.



Many horses may quietly tie-up well and like to be pet on the neck or top areas of their torso. However, that same calm and friendly

horse can viciously kick or jump around erratically when touched anywhere else. If you do not know the horse, it is unwise to quickly reach under and touch them in the under-belly or flanks. Similar caution is urged with the feet. This does not suggest that you should show timid behaviour, but instead recommending to use common-sense awareness and not taking unnecessary risks is important to your wellbeing and of others.

Corn Broom training is simple but has evolved and improved for me by trial and error over many years. I playfully refer to this as "aggravating foals". It is valuable time spent.

I typically start with touching and brushing on top of the horse's back and then down the sides of their torso. That reassures them that the Broom is not a predator and death is not imminent. Then I will progress to other areas of the top-line line, like the neck and croup area. Horse can be quite shy about being touched on their ears, muzzle and top of their head. So, naturally we spend extra time on the head and face. Some may be very "touchy" about contact in their croup and tail areas. Over several days during brief sessions, we persistently "aggravate" the horse by Broom-touching various areas until they stop acting aggravated or frightened.



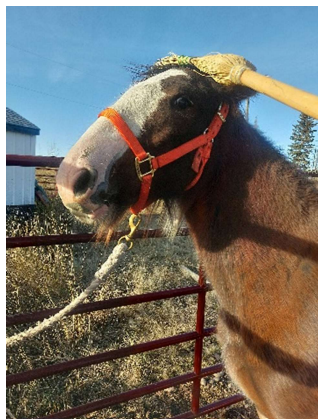
Depending on how the horse is acting, we will work our way down with the Broom to touch the legs from all angles. Touching them between the legs, both front and back, is very important. Then we may move to the underside of the chest, belly and udder. The udder and sheath area should be touched from both sides, as well as from between the rear legs.

Being able to easily touch the udder area is a critically important in filly foals that will be future nursing mares. Being able to easily touch the sheath area on colts is very important too. When a filly is accustomed to being broom-touched in the udder area, that is a good time to carefully reach under and scratch the udder area between the nipples. They soon grow to love being scratched there. That contact pays dividend later when you need to milk colostrum out of the nipples.

Moving the Broom around on their head, face and muzzle is a precursor to lots of hands-on-face time. That is important because a horse needs to be quite comfortable and calm when you need to attach the bridle or halter, insert a bit, check their teeth, or administer medicine, etc.

When imprint training newborns and as foals grow, I like to place my hands all over their head and muzzle area, as well as opening their mouth. Later when needing to bridle an 18 hand Shire, you will be glad you spent “face-time” with your foal, instead of your phone.

Normally my Broom Training sessions do not exceed 5 minutes. They always end with the broom put away and a friendly petting and praising session. A treat of oats is a nice reward at that time. Scratching a favourite spot or brushing them is a good reward for their cooperation and progress made.



We augment the Broom in a similar manner by touching them with other tools like a saddle pad, rope or leather straps, etc. Each item feels different to the horse. Trying a variety of items helps them to become accepting of unexpected touches by unfamiliar things.

There are other training tasks that we can do to reduce risk. For instance, when horses are standing in a tie stall or tied anywhere else, we will quietly sneak into position and when they do not expect it, we tap or touch them on the rear legs with the Corn Broom. Alternatively, toss a saddle blanket or towel at them when they do not expect it. Suddenly rattling a tin pail with some gravel or starting a chain saw in

the barn can get them accustomed to loud unexpected noises.

A practical tip: If when finished with a Corn Broom, you simply lean it up against the fence, you will soon be purchasing a new Broom. Bored horses love to investigate and play with things. They will drag Corn Broom into their corral, chew on the straw and break the wooden handle. I have purchased an embarrassingly large numbers of Corn Brooms over the years. I try to remember to leave the Broom in a better location.

A dangerous myth: The unexpected will happen at horse shows, parades and other public events. The notion of a “Bomb-Proof Horse” is a dangerous myth. It is also a dangerous marketing ploy used with success on naïve horse buyers. Regardless of how calm, well trained and “safe” you think your horse may be, something completely foreign and unexpected can suddenly happen and instantly create danger and disaster. Broom training helps to reduce risk but cannot eliminate risk. Horse owners can never eliminate all the risks. We should always carry insurance to protect ourselves. The simple Corn Broom can make your foals safer and more fun for you and your family to enjoy.



Starcastle Neeva at 4 days old