

Herbs for Dapples and Lustrous Coats

The outward appearance is usually a very good indication of the state of health on the inside. Not only does feeding herbs have the distinct advantage of improving and maintaining good health on the inside, but your horse will externally gleam with it! Herbs have such a pronounced effect because they have a three-fold action of providing essential nutrients necessary for healthy coat (and hoof) growth, stimulating circulation and detoxifying the body.

There are many herbs rich in a variety of nutrients that are essential for healthy coat growth, and that are in a form that is easily metabolized. Kelp would have to be the starting point in this regard as this incredible resource contains no fewer than 25 vitamins and 92 different mineral elements, besides a host of different amino-acids, which make up to a minimum of 9-11% of Kelp's composition. One word of caution with Kelp is that it is not suitable for horses that suffer from hyper-thyroidism because of its high iodine content. Even with normal horses, caution should be taken that one does not conjunctively feed another supplement that is high in iodine. In Kelp's case moderation is key, and if used as such, it is regarded as perfectly safe and highly beneficial! Another beneficial herb is Clivers because it contains the hair-strengthening mineral silica, as well as copper which helps to encourage a rich colour in red and dark coloured horses. Horses that are copper deficient often have a burnt orange tinge to their coats, and the individual hairs themselves are curled and split at the ends. Other copper-rich herbs include Kelp, Rosehips and Dandelion. Fenugreek seed is rich in vitamin E, which promotes healthy skin and hair.

Nettle, Hawthorn and Rosehip are all nutritious and excellent circulatory stimulants. Nettle is a renowned coat conditioner as it has the marvelous ability to bring out beautiful dapples. Increasing circulation helps because it carries nutrients out to the growth surface where they are needed.

Herbs that stimulate circulation also have the effect of carrying away waste products, thus having a supportive role in detoxifying the system. Herbs that have a directly detoxifying effect are the liver (hepatic) and kidney (diuretic) herbs. A dull, yellowish coat commonly reflects a toxic build-up in the system, and if timely action is taken to use herbs that support the liver in its function to filter out and neutralize toxins, it could well prevent potentially serious health problems. The best herb for this purpose is Milk Thistle seed, as its active constituent silymarin has the ability to heal and regenerate liver cells. Silymarin takes a while to take affect, so to be really beneficial it should be supplemented for a minimum of 6- 8 weeks (ideally 12). Only the seeds of the Milk Thistle contain silymarin, and these need to be fed in powdered form as the tough shell of the seed is practically indigestible. Expect to see a lustre in your horse's coat after 6 weeks, and after 12 weeks your horse will probably have a gleam that

perhaps you could not have even imagined possible! Milk Thistle is great to use as a preventative, on a once or twice yearly routine (for 6-8 weeks each time) for most horses, but particularly for those in a competitive routine. I have always found that the benefit of using Milk Thistle seed is even greater enhanced by co-supplementing it with the diuretic herb Dandelion. Nettle also combines well with these herbs, as it is a blood-cleanser. Other cleansing herbs include those rich in sulphur, such as Garlic and Echinacea, and these herbs help to prevent bacterial skin infections.

Other common-sense approaches to dealing with a dull coat is a healthy diet (that includes sufficient oils, and good quality salt – preferably natural sea salt), as well as ensuring that your horse is not carrying a worm burden (there are many herbs that have vermifuge and vermicial properties, so they are well worthwhile including in a worm control routine), and not shampooing your horse's coat too regularly as this removes natural oils from your horse's coat. Another management principle is that if your horse has sweated up and dried off, and the salt is left behind in the coat it can increase the likelihood that it will become sunburnt. Sometimes you see what would have otherwise been a beautifully coloured horse with a dull yellow patch of hair under the saddle area – this could have been avoided if the horses was thoroughly groomed off as soon as the sweat had dried properly, or better still, sponged or hosed out of the coat with plain tap water – and most horses love a good hose-off on a hot summer's day!!