



External Parasite Control

The Educated Horseman: Management Series



Heavy rain, thunderstorms, longer days and increasing temperatures indicate when summer is approaching in Louisiana. While many of us welcome the opportunity to spend more time in the saddle; no one is excited about the return of bugs.

These insects not only create a nuisance but also are potential disease carriers. It is important to understand the health concerns associated with external parasite interactions with livestock and to create a management plan that works best for your situation.

Flies are among the most persistent pests of horses. There are many varieties of flies that are particularly bothersome to horses, including horse flies, deer flies, black flies, gnats and mosquitoes. These pests reproduce in a wide variety of habitats, ranging from manure and garbage to the living tissue of animals.



To reduce the overall population of fly species and reduce the variety of potential health concerns they pose, a multifaceted approach should be taken:

- **Control moisture** – Wet areas are breeding and feeding grounds for insects. Keep stalls dry, eliminate standing water in low pasture areas and feeders, repair plumbing leaks, cover rain barrels and create adequate drainage around your barn.
- **Sanitation** – A key to reducing the pest population is to reduce their breeding grounds. Clean stalls, pens and other areas of confinement daily. Feeders should be built to minimize feed waste, and wasted feed should be collected daily. Remove garbage from the barn area daily. Cover horse feed.
- **Physical Barriers** – Use external barriers such as fly sheets, masks and boots to provide protection from flies and other biting insects. Blasts of air from fans directed down and outward above doors can help reduce flies from entering barns.
- **Insecticides** – Residual insecticides applied to walls, ceilings and rafters of barns, run-in sheds and other farm buildings can provide up to six weeks of pest control. While effective, continuous use of residual insecticides causes resistance in fly populations and is not recommended as the only method of pest control. Space sprays, fogs and mists are valuable in reducing large populations of adult flies. The most common insecticides used are those containing pyrethrins, which are short acting and must be reapplied frequently. Some insecticides also can be applied directly to horses to prevent bites from most flying pests.
- **Biological Control** – Biological control is another nonchemical method to reduce fly populations. Several species of parasitic wasps may be purchased from commercial companies. The theory is that these wasps use the fly pupa (cocoon) as their hosts, killing developing flies before they hatch. Deposit these wasps near manure piles and other known breeding sites for flies.
- **“Feed-through” Fly Control** – Feed additives are available that contain ingredients designed to prevent the

development of fly larvae in manure. Two major categories for “feed-through” fly control products are those containing organophosphates and those that are organophosphate free. Both types have been declared safe for use in horses. It is suggested to begin feeding the fly control supplement before fly season starts. Multiple types are available, and research should be done to determine which type is best for your situation.

A successful pest control program will include the interruption of insect life cycle, elimination of pest breeding materials, control of moisture, using physical barriers and the appropriate use of insecticides. While there is no way to completely eradicate the insect population around your barn, using a combination of methods will help manage these nuisances that also can contribute to disease.

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