

Introduction

The horses in a small herd, a blend of beautiful and rich colors, lift their heads from the watering hole, droplets dribbling from their long whiskers. Although of different breeds and ages, all the horses have fuzzy ears and are beginning to shed long, woolly coats, their defense against the previous winter months.



Is that a predator he hears? A copper-colored mustang, who looks every bit as wild as his heritage suggests, decides to flee for survival. The rest of the horses follows his cue, and although barefoot, thunder over the uneven rocky ground, nimbly navigating the trees, shrubs, and fallen logs. Each one, even the draft paint colt, performs flying-lead changes effortlessly, seeming to float over the land as he dodges the natural obstacles.

This band, horses of health, spirit, and life must surely be far from human influence. Mother Nature in her infinite wisdom has given this ragtag herd all that it needs to be in such balance.

Suddenly, the ghostly gray lifts his head and stares intently over the hill. With a toss of his head and a loud whinny, off he blazes over the hill with the rest following closely. The object of their excitement is a small blonde woman who stands with her arms outstretched in joy. Each gets a scratch on the withers and a carrot; each hopes it's his time to play. This time, she holds the hand-tied rope halter toward the spirited gray who enthusiastically sticks his head in while she gently ties the knot. The other horses in the herd watch with knowing interest and approval.

The gray horse seems to dance with this human as she communicates her wishes from the ground. There are no whips or chains to make him obedient. Instead, because of natural communication and respect, he follows her cues on a loose leadline and navigates obstacles of logs, jumps and shrubs, obviously loving this play time.

The woman, knowing this horse is inviting her onto his bare back, swings on and asks him to turn his head. He quickly complies as he knows the hand-tied halter will come off. Does he turn and run away with her because there are no physical bonds to hold him? No. Instead, he appreciates the trust placed in him and follows her seemingly invisible cues. Floating across the ground, they accomplish gait transitions, flying lead changes, jumps and other maneuvers—all without anything on his head while the herd watches.

Although this natural horse “paradise” may seem out of reach, it is more achievable than you think. The secret lies in simply following a natural horse care approach. Indeed, natural horse care is not the wave of the future—it’s already here! Just as many people have turned to a more holistic and healthy lifestyle for themselves, their horses too are benefiting from this balanced awareness.

Horses today are viewed more as companions or members of the family rather than beasts of burden, and horse guardians/caretakers are realizing it’s important to allow horses to be “horses.” It is essential to fulfill their basic biological and psychological needs as a whole or holistically. The way they are kept, fed, cared for, worked with, and related to needs to align with their equine nature as much as possible.

The main elements of a natural horse care approach included in this book are:

- Environment which consists of a horse's natural living area, with a herd or companion, allowing them to adapt to environmental changes naturally, and special seasonal considerations.

- Nutrition/Feeding; formulating a species-appropriate way of feeding, beneficial natural sources for feedstuffs, reading feed labels, and special considerations for metabolically challenged horses.

- Equine health covering general health, equine dentistry, parasite control, colic, what manure can tell you, special needs of young and senior horses, traveling with your horse and how to be a great client for your equine veterinarian. Also complementary care options; homeopathy, essential oils, flower essences, iridology and alternatives to chemical use.

- Natural hoof care. Why barefoot hooves are healthy, drawbacks of shoeing, barefoot basics, what to expect from a natural trimmer and dealing with laminitis naturally.

- Natural horsemanship basics, bringing emotionally shut-down horses back to life, and building communication, trust and fun with toys and tools.

We'll cover the whole horse from head to toe in an easy to follow format while integrating some stories about a natural herd. The extensive resource guide provides a variety of educational sources including my favorite books, websites and publications to further your knowledge of various natural horse care topics.

The purpose of this book is to present ways to do just that—to introduce you to the basics of natural horse care and share with you some stories about a natural herd. I hope to 1) inspire you to look at what is normal with horses and start asking questions, 2) give you an easy-to-follow plan with which you can relate and care for your equine partner naturally, and 3) show you that horses can talk, and if you truly listen, you will hear them.

By understanding what is natural for the horse and following these simple alternatives to normal horse care, you too can create paradise for your equine partner. All it takes is the desire to become truly involved with your horses and allow them to be what they are, HORSES.