



## Finding Balance with Flying Bugs

by Ginger Krantz

Fly-frazzled?  
Relax your mind  
and help your  
horse relax too.

We are all sympathetic toward our horses as they express distress at the onslaught of insects in the summer months. We watch them swat flies with a fast swing of their head; we avoid their hind end and the potential swipe of a rear leg deflecting a bug.

At the same time natural horse care has taught us that movement is good and stimulates horses' circulation; that the brushing movement of their tail to sweep flies away, the twitching of the muscles to dislodge a landing bug, and the stomping of their hooves are all beneficial.

Movement is good for the horse. Yet, we also must consider that we have domesticated horses; we have limited their living space and movement, and our containment of horses within a small area causes the local environment to become out of balance.

This imbalance in the environment contributes to a proliferation of flies and the horses' inability to avoid them. Therefore, I believe it is our responsibility to do what we can to reestablish balance in the lifestyle and living environment for our horses, to compassionately support them in the summer months, and to protect them from the added stress they experience when combating an overabundance of flies.

### Relax Your Mind

As an equine healing practitioner I address not only disease and

injuries in horses but behavioral and emotional issues as well. In the summer months I find many horses in a state of intense anxiety from the stress of being constantly on guard and continually defending themselves from flying, biting insects. When I work with a horse in this state, the foremost need is for me to help calm his nervous system and mind. After he has relaxed and returned to his natural, meditative state, the accumulated tension in his body releases. While he is in this balanced state, the bugs stop attempting to bite him. Everything within and around the horse quiets down and from here I can continue on to do deeper work.

The basic defense for horses against the onslaught of insects is to remain centered within themselves and relaxed. You can help your horse achieve this by embodying an attitude of calm support within yourself. When you maintain a quiet, meditative mind your horse will mirror your state of being and therefore be less of a focal point for insects.

Take the position of being an ally to your horse. Do not become caught in a fright and fight response to the bugs. If you notice fear or anger arise at the sight of a fly, choose to let your tension go. When you are close to your horse, support him by *calmly* brushing landing flies off his body. Horses appreciate this level of sensitivity and care from a human.

Remaining calm and centered near your animal frees your mind to be more fully present. In this place you will notice the very cal-

culated approaches of the horse and be able to keep them away from your horse. With a calm, compassionate mind you will naturally embody the equine leadership qualities of awareness, tracking, comforting and responding to your horse's needs. If you practice this discipline you will, in time, notice that when your horse is near you he does not respond emotionally to the landing of a hard-to-reach fly. Instead he will choose to turn that area of his body towards you to present the fly, silently asking you to please remove it.

You will learn that when you maintain a balanced state of mind, it not only deepens your relationship with your horse but also helps to minimize the number of flies that land on you.

### **Protect Your Horses' Body**

Even with a countenance of peace there will be times when the fly population is at a fevered pitch. Whether your horse chooses the barn or goes out during the day, fly-discouraging leg wraps can significantly reduce the emotional and physical stress levels he experiences. They virtually eliminate the landing of flies on the lower legs, greatly reducing the repeated leg stomping and angry kicking out that can aggravate acute or chronic conditions in a compromised horse.

Leg wraps are especially helpful for horses who have instability from a neurological condition and for horses with: tendon injuries, arthritic joints, lameness and laminitis. Using leg wraps during the summer months also make it more humane to ask a horse to stand quietly, such as when tied.

Remove leg wraps at night, after dusk, when a significant portion of the biting insects are dormant. This avoids moisture build up beneath the wraps and allows for air to flow over those areas. It also gives the horse's body a break from any friction the wraps may cause so as to avoid any hair rubs.

If you choose to protect your horse with fly spray, please check the ingredients of the product to ensure it is non-toxic. Even "natural" products may contain petroleum products, which have been forcefully removed from mother earth and are toxic to the body. This is very important, because fly spray becomes airborne and is absorbed into the lungs and body through inhalation. It also is absorbed into the body through the skin as the pores open from the heat of the summer sun.

You can make fly spray yourself by simply adding appropriate essential oils to a spray bottle of water. The essential oil Lemon-grass is one that is known to deter insects, as is Citronella (which requires caution as it can be irritating to the skin). Others, such as Lavender and Cedarwood, can be added to calm the horse and support the same outcome.

### **Adapt Your Horses' Turnout Program**

Horses are intelligent beings and have their own proven methods for protecting themselves from insects. When horses are given the option to come and go from a barn during the summer months, night turnout becomes their natural choice. They rest in the shelter of the barn for a majority of the day, then emerge to enjoy the cool moisture of the evening and to graze throughout the night. This schedule can make for a sleepy horse mid-day, but this is part of the natural process that serves to keep them calm and relaxed when the bugs and sun are at peak.

If you do not have the ideal natural environment that offers your

horse full time turnout with a barn or run in shed as a shelter, then you can improvise. Turn your horse out in the evening. When your horse is in the barn during the day, keep the lights off or down to simulate a shady spot and so as not to attract or stimulate flies.

If there is a lack of air circulation in the barn you can install a box fan to create the effect of a natural breeze. A fan can offer tremendous relief from flies, but be sure to position the fan out of horses' reach and where it will not cause dust to become airborne and enter the horses' sensitive respiratory systems. Above all, be sure your electrical hookup for the fan is safe to avoid the chance of fire.

If you need to turn your horses out during the day, then placing them in paddocks in friendly pairs or groups can be a big stress reducer. This gives them the freedom to move into their natural position of shared defense: side to side and nose to tail. Together they can keep the flies off the face and body of each other along with one side being completely protected.

### **Manage the Environment**

The freedom to come and go from shelter 24/7 and turning our horses out in pairs or groups are natural ways to contribute to keeping them calm and protected from bugs. Yet many of our horses live in relatively small areas with limited turnout space. This can cause an imbalance in our environment, which is often reflected in a high concentration of flies in and around turnout areas and the barn. So how can we support our horse to remain calm and to also bring balance back to these concentrated areas?

In their natural state horses would be grazing over a large area and not standing within close proximity of fresh feces. Flies collect and lay eggs upon decaying organic matter and manure, so manure removal is an important contribution to fly reduction. Remove fresh manure piles often and keep the composting manure piles as far away from the barn and turn out as possible.

Utilize fly parasites/ predators. Introduce a colony of natural fly predators, small bugs that destroy the fly pupae that are maturing in your manure piles. Barn managers who use them report that they make a significant reduction to the fly population.

### **Finding Balance**

In a world out of balance we have the power to find it within ourselves. When the flies are intense and the manure is piled high, we can tap into the inspiration within us, the love we feel for our horses, to center ourselves and from this point act calmly and effectively on their behalf. ♡

#### **About the author:**

Ginger Krantz is an Equine Healing Practitioner with 21 years of experience and education. She graduated from a four-year program in Healing Science Training at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and is a former member of the faculty. Ginger also studied awareness and the earth based tradition of shamanic healing with Tom Brown Jr. at his Tracker School. For more information about equine healing, equine healing workshops and to contact Ginger, please visit:

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