



Home Remedies for Common Animal Sickness

With the shortage of farm vets to help to our sick animals, we often turn to home remedies for common ailments. Here are some go-to products from hobby farmers across the country

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The warm, summer breeze kicks up eddies of dust in the barnyard. Monte, my beautiful Kieger mustang, coughs. He coughs again. Monte's allergies are bothering him.

In the feed room cabinet, I find the foil, sealed container of organic iodine I always keep on hand. Iodine is an anti-inflammatory and expectorant that loosens phlegm, making it easier to cough out. Coughing can be brought on by dust, mold, exercise—anything that overworks the respiratory system.

Frequent coughing in horses can lead to life-threatening complications such as heaves. But all I have to do is add one tablespoon of iodine to Monte's evening grain for 21 days and his cough will disappear.

Using my favorite remedy means I don't have to wrestle anything down the horse's throat and I don't have to give him an injection.

It's inexpensive and it saves me time, effort, and the possibility of injury.

Organic iodine is my reach-for cure. Other hobby farmers around the United States have their own life-saving remedies. Here's a sampling of what works for them.

Healing Herbs

Herbal remedies have been healing and soothing for centuries. One herbal concoction, a calming product from Bach Flower Essences, is Rescue Remedy. Alice Stebbins, who lives on five acres in Duval, Wash., carries Rescue Remedy, both drops and spray, in her purse.

Before Stebbins hauled her nervous mare to Idaho for breeding, she added drops of Rescue Remedy to the mare's drinking water. "I put about six drops in a water bucket," she says. This easy application limits stress for both owner and horse.

Stebbins also suggests a dose when a horse is injured. A few sprays of Rescue Remedy into its mouth will quiet the animal so it can be helped. She says that because a horse can pick up on its owner's anxiety, "I often recommend that both of them take it."

Stebbins's horses aren't the only animals that benefit from a dose of her favorite tonic. When her dogs have gotten hurt, she's given them Rescue Remedy, too. She also takes it herself ... "It's great stuff."

Kristen Molencamp of Plato, Minn., keeps tea tree oil around as a topical treatment for her horses. "I really like tea tree oil for minor cuts and things," she says.

Tea tree oil is an extract from the leaves of the Australian Tea Tree, *Melaleuca alternifolia*. The oil is an anti-yeast, antifungal and antibacterial substance that also comes as a cream. It's available in health-food outlets, pharmacies and some larger stores such as Wal-Mart.

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Kitchen Cures

Kitchen pantries store food for the table and often, remedies for the barn. Nicole Raines, of Sidney, Neb., raises goats, chickens and rabbits on her six-acre farm. She keeps a rabbit remedy in her pantry—Old Fashioned Quaker Oats. "We



give them oatmeal on occasion to keep them from getting hairballs,” she says.

Her Satin rabbits shed and groom continually; hairballs can have dire consequences since rabbits can't regurgitate. Oatmeal is a fiber that keeps the digestive system moving, cutting down on the possibility of hair collecting and forming a blockage.

Raines gives each rabbit a handful of uncooked oatmeal after they've given birth and in the spring when they start shedding heavily. It's easy, she says. "They like it."

Kathy Arnold of Whistler's Glen Alpacas in Hudson, Ohio, also keeps a favorite remedy in her kitchen. "One of the things I always have in my refrigerator is live-culture yogurt."

On her 11-acre farm, Arnold breeds and keeps anywhere from 50 to 65 alpacas.

"If I see somebody isn't feeling quite well or if their stool starts to look like it's not quite the consistency it should be, one of the first things I'll give them is yogurt." The yogurt adds good, live bacteria back into their digestive system. Arnold explains, "The health of the rumen is extremely important."

Our Vet's Advice

By Dr. Dianne Hellwig, DVM, PhD

For millennia, man has searched for remedies and methods to cure the physical ailments of both himself and the animals he cares for.

Good old "trial and error" or empirical evidence was the norm before knowledge of animal physiology and the scientific method became the standard. Observations were made about the usefulness of certain herbs and chemical substances found in our environment. Some of them worked very well and some failed miserably. It is a common belief that herbs and plants are natural, and therefore, harmless. Think about hemlock! The disciplines of veterinary and human medical science have been effective in minimizing some of these failures.

As a scientist, I believe in utilizing knowledge that has been derived from bona fide clinical trials.

Having said that, I have also successfully used some of the remedies found in this article.

Sometimes there isn't the time or the assistance available when we need to do something as soon as possible. We make the assertion that if it works in humans and other animals, it should work in this particular animal.

Most of the time this works, but we need to proceed with caution. Most drugs and chemicals are metabolized in the liver and kidneys, utilizing enzymes that are unique to a given species. In plain language, this means that some drugs and chemicals may be harmful or even deadly to certain species. For example, Tylenol can be deadly for cats. The dosages and methods of administration can also be critical. Drugs that have been designed to be given intravenously may not be effective when given orally and subjected to the digestive juices of the intestinal tract.

The bottom line is that while we should always remain open to new methods and ideas, we should proceed with caution. Always do your homework when it comes to you and your animals. Find out as much as you can about the physiology of your animals and the substances you are planning to use.

Try to utilize your veterinarian as much as you can for both knowledge and technical expertise.

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An alpaca cria can suffer stress caused by too much handling. To cut down on the number of times Arnold must handle a baby she's bottle feeding, she says, "I put the live-culture yogurt into the milk and shake it up real good."

To dose her baby alpacas, Arnold uses a 10cc syringe with a one-and-a-half-inch long applicator tip. She slides it into the side of their mouth and slowly administers 6ccs or 10ccs of yogurt. She warns, "Make sure they're swallowing nicely because you don't want them to aspirate."

Arnold gives her adult alpacas 10 to 15cc's with a large syringe and a longer applicator. She usually administers the yogurt once a day for a few days. The alpacas seem to like the taste and Arnold's seen consistently good results.



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Medicine Cabinet Fixes

MaryLu Worth of Norco, Calif., raises goats on her 2.5-acre farm. She keeps a people-product around to treat bloat problems. “I actually treat it with Gas-X,” she says. While Pepto Bismol and baking soda also work, Worth always reaches for Gas-X first. “It’s been the most effective,” she explains. She reads the package and doses her goats according to the listed weights.

Gas-X comes in a capsule and getting a goat to take a pill isn’t an easy task. Worth says, “I push it down their throats. There is a device called a pill plunger that you can use, but I just make them swallow it by putting it way far back in their mouth and not getting bit—hopefully.” She holds their mouth shut and strokes their throat until they swallow the pill.

Worth watches her goat herd closely for any signs of diarrhea.

“You should always consider treating diarrhea. You can use Pepto-Bismol or Kaopectate.”

Worth warns that persistent diarrhea can be dangerous and to wait no longer than 48 hours before contacting your veterinarian. A veterinarian will culture a fecal sample to determine the cause of the problem. If it’s an infection, the animal will need antibiotics.

Dehydration can accompany diarrhea and will need immediate attention. To replenish fluids and rebalance electrolytes, Worth says to give them Pedialyte. Use a dosing syringe and follow the directions on the package.

Barb Kirchner keeps llamas on her 5-acre farm in Pleasant Hill, Ore.

She says her veterinary medicine cabinet is probably bigger than most, but she wants to make sure she can help a llama if something happens on a weekend. One of her must-have remedies is hydrogen peroxide, something she reaches for whenever she spots a llama with a wound. She’s had llamas get cut on fences, “just from being silly, jumping in places they shouldn’t be,” she says.

Briars can work through a llama’s wool and make an abscess, though Kirchner notes that “Most of the time you really never know where it [the wound] comes from.” A dosing syringe filled with hydrogen peroxide works to clean and flush a wound.

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Feed Store Fixes

Nicole Raines raises goats on her Sidney, Neb., farm. Her reach-for remedy is Nutri-Drench, a high-energy product that kick-starts a young goat’s digestion. When Raines began breeding goats, she lost a 10-day-old kid and found out later it was probably due to low blood sugar.

Now she keeps Nutri-Drench on hand. “It’s got vitamins and molasses, and it goes straight to their bloodstream in seconds,” she says. She simply squirts the required amount directly into their mouths. Follow the instructions on the bottle and use a dosing syringe to ensure the proper amount.

Kirsten Molencamp of Plato, Minn., keeps another favorite remedy—aloe lotion—around to treat her horses. “In terms of minor scrapes and cuts, it’s my favorite!”

Tips

For more information or to order products, check these sources:

Lixotinic: A Pfizer product available at your veterinary clinic. For more information, visit www.pfizerah.com or call (800) 366-5288.

Nutri-Drench: Available at your feed store or online at www.bovidr.com/nutridrench.html

Organic Iodine Dextrose: One brand is manufactured by Vedco and is available at your feed store or veterinary clinic. Check www.vedco.com and click on “E.D.D.I. 20 gr.” or call (888) 708-3326.

Probios: Manufactured by Vets Plus, Inc. and is available at your feed store or veterinary clinic. To order online, go to



www.JeffersLivestock.com or call (800) 533-3377.

Rescue Remedy: Available at many natural food outlets and pharmacies. To order online and for more information, go to www.BachFlower.com or call (800) 214-2850. Aloe Heal Cream, made by Farnam, promotes healing, allowing the wound to mend quickly from the inside out. In fact, she says, "I'll put it on anything that doesn't need stitches."

Kim Denny of Chestnut Farm in Hardwick, Mass., raises a variety of animals, including grass-fed cattle. She says that during the winter, "We buy molasses in 50-gallon barrels."

She fills a five-gallon bucket with half molasses and half hot water, and sprinkles it on a five-by-five round bale. "That makes a big difference in our cattle; it's the only supplement they get." She says the cattle are more energetic, eat better and are generally more alert than those fed on straight hay.

Denny's found a quick, easy way to treat her sheep for worms. "We use diatomaceous earth sprinkled onto the feed." Diatomaceous earth is the fossilized remains of hard-shelled algae. The skeletons of these tiny creatures cut the parasites and work their way into moving parts, causing the parasite to "leak" from the inside out.

Denny uses the powdered form and says, "a handful will do—about a half-cup to 35 pounds of feed. I'll do that twice and let it go for six months." Denny's farm is organic and she doesn't use chemical dewormers. She says sheep worms can become resistant to traditional dewormers and it's important to treat for them regularly. Diatomaceous earth in the sheep's feces will even kill fly maggots.

Take the Sting Out of Your Sting

The air around the farm hums and buzzes with winged activity, and anyone who gets in the way can be met with an itchy bite or a sharp sting. From yellow jackets to flies to mosquitoes, here are some home remedies for the two-leggeds who care for the four-leggeds. Before you try anything new, please check with your doctor.

Household ammonia: Soak gauze or a cottonball with ammonia and place it directly on a sting. I stock a supply in my barn and I carry a small bottle of ammonia in my saddlebag when I ride.

Aloe: A commercial form or the juice squeezed from a plant leaf relieves the heat and soreness of a sting or a minor burn. MaryLu Worth says, "I put aloe on immediately, straight out of the plant." Get an aloe plant and keep a ready supply on hand.

Prevention: Mosquitoes, harbingers of many dangerous diseases, lay their eggs in standing water. During the summer, Kim Denny washes out her water bins twice a day. Frequent changing of water and scrubbing with a 10 percent bleach rinse will kill mosquito larvae. When Barb Kirchner of Pleasant Hill, Ore., notices a llama that's not chewing its cud, that's not eating or that has diarrhea, she reaches for Probios, a beneficial bacteria formula. She says, "It's a kind of insurance. It can't really do much harm and it might help." If she thinks a llama may be dehydrated, she has another remedy and a special tool. "I've got a turkey baster so if they're not drinking, I can get some Gatorade in them."

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Prescription Panaceas

Every hobby farmer with livestock has a collection of remedies that may not be available anywhere except a veterinary hospital.

Kirchner keeps a bottle of Lixotinic in her medical supplies. While mainly a horse product, this vitamin- and mineral-rich liquid works well for her llamas. It boosts appetite and energy levels in an animal that's not eating well. Kirchner says some of her llamas will eat grain with Lixotinic on it.

For others, especially if they aren't eating or if they are habitually picky eaters, she uses a dosing syringe. She says, "I've had llamas I've had to dose for two or three days, morning and night, to get them back to eating."

Michelle Bolt of Tanglewood Farms in Canton, Ga., keeps an array of prescription remedies on hand because of the large variety of miniature animals found on her 10-acre farm. The farm includes 20 different breeds of miniature pigs, horses, goats, sheep and cows.



Despite the variety of possible patients, Bolt always keeps some universal standbys around. “Clavamox,” she says. “That’s a standard antibiotic. And Vitamin B12 shots.” Bolt’s farm is also a breeding facility and she uses the Vitamin B shots anytime she has babies born that might need a bit of extra energy. She says, “Any frail animal—goats, sheep, horses, donkeys—anything will get an injection.”

Bolt also maintains a supply of people medicine on hand. She says, “I always keep St. Joseph’s Aspirin for Children on hand in case we have something with a sprain.”

Before reaching for any remedy, do your homework first. Watch for clues to indicate what problem the animal may have. Listen to respiration and heart rate. Take a temperature.

Check to see if the animal is eating and drinking. Look at the consistency of its manure. Try your remedy, but if the problem persists, call your veterinarian.

All these reach-for remedies have champions among hobby farmers around the country. However, always check with your veterinarian before using a product in a way that’s not originally intended.

About the Author: Deanna Mather Larson is a freelance writer and horse owner based in Oregon.

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