

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 3

The Whole Horse Journal

A guide to natural horse care, training, and performance

May/June 1997

Marvelous Moxa

BY SUSAN TENNEY

Relax! The woman you've seen at your stable who appears to be sharing a cigar with her horse is probably not puffing a big Havana in an effort to emulate the recent cigar smoking fad. If she is quietly moving a pungent, burning stick close to the horse who looks as though he might fall asleep, what you are actually witnessing is the miracle known as moxa.

Moxa is a powdered herb mixture that is burned on or above the skin to channel penetrating heat to the tissue below. This practice, called "moxibustion," has been used for healing in China for over 2500 years. The art of moxibustion may have endured the test of time in the East because it is effective, non-invasive, and affordable. Today moxa is increasingly popular in the West due to its ease of application and success in helping a variety of conditions in humans and animals.

Oriental Medicine practitioners and average laypeople alike find moxa very safe and simple to use. With a little bit of practice, you can use it to help heal horses and humans in your life. This ancient practice can be used on your horse to relieve tight muscles, arthritis, old scars, colic, and more.

Equine Essential

"Horses respond to moxa so well that its use should be integral to every equine practice," asserts Peggy Fleming, DVM, a veterinary acupuncturist who practices,

teaches, and writes about Traditional Oriental Medicine. Fleming has studied with a Japanese moxa specialist who has helped deepen her understanding of this wonderful healing method. In her busy equine practice in Dade City, Florida, Fleming sees a large number of horses with musculoskeletal problems. She praises the effectiveness of moxa for healing these issues. In fact, Fleming treats about 60 percent of the almost 300 horses she sees each month with moxa.

In Fleming's experience, acute musculoskeletal problems like muscle spasms are considered to be caused by stagnation or blockage of the horse's chi, the core life force energy of the body. For these conditions, moxa is used to help the chi move freely again. Chronic musculoskeletal problems including muscle atrophy and weakness are usually caused by a deficiency of chi in the body. For these horses, moxa's healing properties go beyond moving chi to actually adding energy to the body in the form of heat.

In addition to using moxa during her treatment of horses, Fleming also instructs many of her clients to treat their animals with moxa between her visits. Fleming calls moxa the "Poor Man's Laser" because although a stick of moxa only costs pennies per session, she finds moxa gets results similar to those achieved by laser machines and other therapeutic devices costing hundreds of dollars.

Continued on page 17



Marvelous Moxa

CONTINUED FROM FRONT COVER

Moxa causes a systemic release of endorphins, natural morphine-like hormones which induce deep relaxation. During treatment, horses will often lick and chew, close their eyes as if to sleep, lower their heads, and relax and raise their tails.

Fleming says, "With moxa I almost always get a strong physiological response. The physical manifestation of relief and healing also allows a profound and personal connection with the horse. I bought all sorts of machines [to use in my practice for getting this kind of result] but they all went in the closet or got sold. There is just something special about moxa."

Although moxa can contain any number of herbs, the most common component is the leaf from the mugwort plant (*artemisia vulgaris*), a cousin of the chrysanthemum family. Often added to the mugwort in much smaller quantities are other herbs and spices like cinnamon, ginger, cloves, pepper, frankincense, myrrh, and a variety of Chinese herbs. Just as ginger and pepper create a hot sensation in the mouth when eaten, the herbs in moxa all help to produce the sensation of heat when burned over the surface of the body. And, like very hot food that can cause you to sweat when you ingest it, the moxa patient can usually feel satisfying warmth extend deeply into the core of the body.

Heat Healing

Most people have experienced how the wonderful warmth of a heat pack or hot water bottle brings welcome relief to tight muscles or cold toes. These heating tools tend to warm the surface of the body. Moxa has a similar but deeper effect. It warms the surface and radiates heat below the surface through acupuncture points. These points are very precise sites on the body (equine or human) that correlate with specific documented healing responses.

Traditionally, moxa was applied directly to acupuncture points on the skin of human patients. The indirect method of moxibustion where the moxa remains just off the surface of the body was developed in the Ming dynasty (1368-1662 AD). It is much easier for the horse owner to use. Dried mugwort and other herbs are crushed and rolled into a cigar-like shape about eight inches long and enclosed in a paper wrapper. The stick of moxa is ignited so that the tip smolders like a lit cigarette or cigar, which is then moved over the surface of the body to deliver its deep warm relief.

Cold Conditions

The primary use of moxa by practitioners is to treat what Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) refers to as "Cold" conditions. When the body is cold both in terms of physical temperature and the Oriental Medical perspective, circulation and other life rhythms diminish. The metabolism of the body slows. The flow of chi, or life energy, is also depressed by the quality of Cold.

Cold conditions are the opposite of inflammation and fever where the body races to attend to injury and illness. Cold conditions are characterized by a stagnation of blood, metabolism, and/or chi. One example is



Cheap and Effective - Although Moxa costs only pennies per session, it can be as effective as electrical therapy tools costing hundreds of dollars.

muscle spasms that result from muscle fibers sticking together, preventing circulation and free movement. A horse with this problem appears stiff and short-strided.

Osteoarthritis, an undesirable deposit (or stagnation) of calcium in the joints, is also considered to be a Cold condition. Impaction colic, where the food in the digestive tract is blocked and stuck, is another Cold condition. Moxa relieves each of these conditions by bringing heat to the troubled area.

Moxa works wonderfully at the site of old injuries, especially in areas where the horse is still sensitive and resistant to massage therapy. Often these areas are stiff and hard to the touch because they are clogged with a buildup of old cellular debris and stagnant chi.

Internal Cold can also occur from prolonged use of anti-inflammatory drugs like phenylbutazolidin, commonly known as bute. Designed to reduce the inflammatory (heat) response in the body, these drugs chemically create temporary internal Cold. Prolonged use of these products can more permanently establish the Cold climate in the horse's metabolism. This creates other imbalances such as gastro-intestinal disturbances. Thus, a drug which was administered to help heal the body actually causes additional disease. In contrast, when used properly, moxa has no such side effects and actually addresses the root cause of illness.

Sometimes a Cold condition can be caused by exposure to external cold, such as extended time spent in cold weather or overuse of ice packs. It can also arise from inside the body. Stress, illness, or being worn down can cause this internal deficiency of metabolic heat. A horse with symptoms reflecting internal Cold may shiver, exhibit unusual grumpiness, and be averse to working in cold weather. The horse with internal Cold may contract emotionally too, acting withdrawn and pulled in, as if his life flame is flickering precariously and needs to be protected.

Fleming marvels at how moxa allows the horse owner to address healing these conditions in such a simple, non-invasive manner. She says moxa provides an opening to the healing process, and, in fact may be all you need to help the horse complete his recovery.

Moxa causes a release of endorphins, hormones which induce deep relaxation. During a session, horses will often lick and chew, close their eyes and lower their heads.

Moxa is an example of how an unusual, simple therapy from ancient times can be used to help the modern horse.

How To Use Moxa

Using sticks of moxa on your horse is easy. It's basically like waving a cigar above the treatment area. With a bit of practice, you can apply this wonderful herb to your horse and watch him literally melt with pleasure. Unlike many massage methods, the application doesn't require physical strength or much coordination. Since you are handling a burning, powerful herb, however, using moxa does demand focus and common sense. Be sure to follow the Common Sense Cautions listed on page 21.

It's a good idea to try the moxa on yourself before using it on your horse. Then you can experience what your horse will feel when you treat him with it.

Before you practice on yourself, gather your materials: a stick of moxa, a 6 x 12-inch piece of tin foil, a butane lighter, an ashtray, and a bowl of water. Sit in a quiet spot that has excellent ventilation for the moxa smoke (an outside location is best).

Once you are seated, locate Large Intestine 4 (LI 4). This point lies on the back of the hand in the web of skin and tissue between the thumb and index finger (see photo below). LI 4 is extremely potent for a treating a wide variety of conditions including immune deficiency. Moxa is said to repel colds when used regularly over LI 4.

Due to its dense composition, moxa takes a few moments to light. Hold the tip of the moxa over the flame of a butane lighter, a lit candle or the burner of a gas stove until the herbs ignite. You may need to blow on the moxa to get it going. When it is ready to use it will have a red ember on the end of the stick, radiating considerable heat. It will also smoke!

WARNING: Do not touch your skin or your horse's skin with the burning moxa. It will burn and blister the area instantly.

Slowly lower the lit end of the moxa stick toward LI 4 to see how hot it feels. You want to get it close enough to feel the heat but not close enough to burn yourself. Most people feel comfortable having the ember about one to two inches from the body. Slowly move the tip down close to the point and then out away from the point. Vary this pointing movement by doing small circles just over the web area. Moxa is meant to be moved continuously in particular patterns above the body.

Apply the moxa above LI 4 for two to four minutes before moving on to the identical area of your other hand. It's best to use moxa symmetrically on the body. If you treat an area on the right side of the body, be sure to treat the same area on the left side.

Note the sensations you experience

as you apply the moxa. Does it feel pleasantly warm or too hot? Often the heat will build up after the first 30 to 60 seconds—be sure to keep the moxa stick a bit farther away from your skin at that time. The speed with which you move the stick can also affect the heat. Slow movements tend to build heat, while faster circles or pointing decreases heat. Does one pattern feel better than another? Do you feel any increase in circulation or tingling?

Once you are finished, extinguish the burning moxa coal by encasing it in the tin foil (see photo page 17). Be sure to make sure the coal is completely cold before you store the moxa.

Equine Application

Before you begin to apply moxa to your horse, read the Common Sense Cautions listed on page 21. Then get your horse ready by choosing a calm area of the barn or paddock where you will not be disturbed. Do not tie the horse while you apply the moxa. The first couple times you work with the moxa, find a friend to hold your horse. You want to give him ample opportunity to move away if he is at all fearful or if the moxa is too hot.

After you and your horse are at ease with the process, you can put him on a lead rope and do the work unassisted. You can use moxa frequently, even once a day, as long as your horse relaxes well with it.

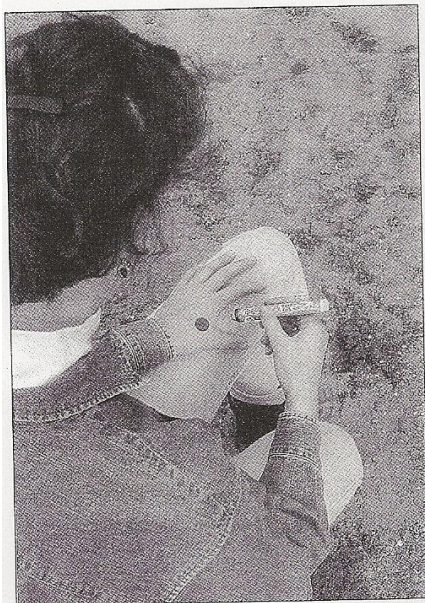


Pointing – Simone Ihlenfeld applies moxa in a pointing pattern to her Thoroughbred mare Sadie. Simone rests her free hand flat on the hindquarter for stability and to monitor heat build up.

Fire Up

Once the moxa is generating heat, approach your horse from the side, making sure the smoke blows away from his face. Pat him and speak to him soothingly and reassuringly. Start by applying the moxa to the large muscles of the horse's loin or hindquarters (see photo above). Select a hand-sized area (about three inches square) to focus the moxa over for a three to seven-minute period before you move to the next region.

For your stability and as a way to monitor the heat, place your free hand flat on the horse's body next to the area where you want to apply the moxa. Slowly lower the burning tip toward your horse's body and start moving the moxa in the pointing motion alter-



Treat Yourself – Susan Tenney applies moxa to the acupressure point known as Large Intestine 4. When used regularly in this area, moxa is said to stimulate the immune system.



Circles – Susan applies Moxa in a circular pattern to the muscles just behind the horse's shoulder.



Sweeping – In this area of the body, Susan uses the moxa in a long sweeping pattern.

SUSAN TENNEY, CMT, lives in Sonoma County, California. She practices Equine Shiatsu Massage in the United States and Europe. She works with horses whose disciplines range from backyard trail riding to international competition.

nating with circles. The heat from moxa is very soothing, but the initial sensation is unique to the horse and can cause concern. Initially, it is wise to keep the stick about four inches from the body. Draw it in closer (within two to three inches of the surface) as the horse starts to relax and grows accustomed to the sensation (usually within two to three minutes.)

Some sensitive horses feel the sensation instantly and become worried. In these cases, hold the stick even higher (six inches off the body) to begin. As you work, adjust the proximity of the moxa until the horse completely accepts the heat. The goal is to get close enough to let the heat penetrate but not so close that it becomes uncomfortable. Move the moxa stick slowly and calmly. Use a reassuring voice as well.

Moxa Patterns

Moxa is usually used in one of the following patterns. Vary the height of the burning point from the body and the speed with which you move the stick to increase or decrease the heat. For example, moxa held two inches above the body and moved slowly will create more heat than the same stick moved quickly. Experiment with the patterns to see which your horse likes best. Also try alternating patterns such as using six to ten pointing motions followed by several circles. Adjust your technique to achieve complete relaxation as shown by the horse breathing deeply, lowering his head, blinking or closing the eyes.

1) Pointing: Hold the stick above the desired point vertically. Move the burning tip of the moxa close to the body as if to point at a particular spot and then draw it back several inches. Repeat this motion, keeping the stick gently moving.

Vary the height and speed of movement according to how your horse reacts. Stay at the same height or move in closer if he stays relaxed, and move further away if he gets uncomfortable. Go slowly if the horse is relaxed, move the stick a bit quicker to disperse the heat if the horse fusses. This technique works well on any area but is particularly useful over small specific areas like a saddle sore or an acupuncture point.

2) Circles: Draw small circles over the general area. Dr. Fleming finds her clients get wonderful results from drawing the Tellington-Jones Team circles with the moxa. These circles are approximately two to four inches in diameter. Imagine the face of a clock on your horse's body. Draw from six o'clock all the way around to just past where you started (about eight o'clock) in a clockwise direction. Pause between circles. Use this technique over small, specific areas or larger, palm-sized areas of muscle.

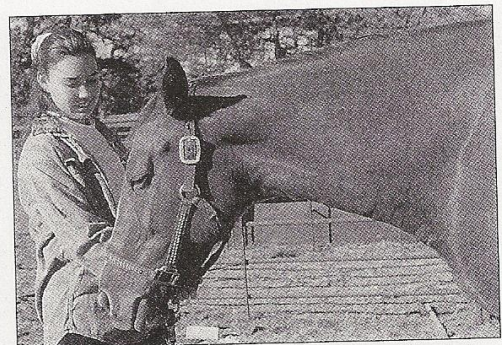
3) Long Sweeping Motion: Point the moxa at an area and then move the ember in a long, sweeping motion as if you were sweeping something out of the body. Once you have moved several inches away from the starting place, pick up the tip, return to the general area where you started and repeat the sweeping motion. Don't brush back and forth like with a paintbrush. Use this pattern over large muscle areas like the loin and hind quarters.

Sedating Effect

Most horses LOVE moxa and will go into a very deep relaxed state. Look for one or more of these signs in your horse: a low hung head, a droopy lower lip, sleepy eyes, deep slow breathing, sighing, and yawning. These signs tell you he is relaxing into the treatment and that moxa is appropriate for this particular horse and condition.

In addition to watching your horse go into a deep sleep, it's fun to note the changes in muscle tone as you work. At the beginning of the session, gently palpate the muscles of your horse's lower back and hindquarters to get a general feel of the

Moxa's deep healing warmth brings relief to tight muscles, arthritic joints and digestive problems.



Sound Asleep – Chris Hoffman holds Sadie during her moxa session. The typically high-strung mare is completely relaxed from the action of the deep-heating herb. Her eyes are closed, the blood vessel beneath her eye is dilated and her nostrils are soft and relaxed.

muscle tone and pliability before you start. In many cases, the deep effects of the moxa will turn even the tightest areas into a soft, floppy, Jello-like tone. You may see these results within minutes as you work one specific site or over a 15 to 20-minute period as you work a variety of areas.

If your horse becomes restless or impatient, you may be holding the moxa too close to the body, moving the stick too slowly or staying in one area too long. Sometimes a horse will love moxa on an area for two to three minutes, but will get fidgety if you stay any longer. Some horses love all of the patterns we describe while others have just one which allows

them to relax. Try to find the correct distance away from the body, favorite pattern and speed for that particular horse.

At times with a very impatient horse, it may be appropriate to allow him to eat hay or grass in order to keep him occupied while you use the moxa. After several sessions, however, you would expect even the most impatient horse to quiet down and enjoy deep heating effect of the moxa.

If your horse becomes progressively agitated no matter what site or pattern you choose, discontinue the moxa. This is a sign the horse is "heating up" and the remedy is not suitable to the situation.

When To Use Moxa

Tight Muscles: Moxa is especially effective for muscle stiffness and muscle spasms. These are often Cold conditions where the energy is congealed or stagnated. Using moxa locally to relax the muscles with the deep heat encourages healing circulation of blood and energy to course through the region.

Aching Joints: If your horse has osteoarthritis or chronically stiff movement from joint problems, use moxa in the area of the joint. Circle the stick in a clockwise motion (which creates a stimulating effect) around the entire joint for several minutes or until you get the desired relaxation response. As long as your horse enjoys it, continue using moxa on the joint regularly. It can be especially effective during cold and damp times of the year when external cold aggravates the situation.

Old Injuries: Moxa also works well over the site of old injuries or traumas. Often the region of an injury remains congested with cellular debris and stagnant chi. For instance, old saddle sores which feel fibrous or lumpy with tissue buildup respond remarkably well to moxa. Moxa helps bring circulation to the area, encourages the removal of waste products and the regeneration of new tissues. It also brings chi to the area, giving a boost of healing energy to the traumatized region.

Scars: Moxa can help reduce scars and relax the tight skin surrounding them. Scars often have a sort of cellular barricade around the center which blocks circulation and chi. Moxa can gently open the area allowing greater range of motion and chi flow.

Massage and Stretching: Moxa works well before massage or stretching, helping the tissues to relax in the most gentle and non-invasive way possible. The muscles may become so relaxed and pliable with just the moxa session that the need for massage will be reduced if not eliminated for that day. Moxa also works well after massage for stubborn areas that refuse to relax through touch.

General Wellness: Use moxa to help keep your horse healthy, happy, and peaceful. Warming points known to stimulate the immune system can help avoid illness. The most important immune points are Stomach 36 and Large Intestine 4 (see photo for location of both points). Moxa can also help supple stiff muscles before a workout to prevent injury and assist tight areas to recover after a hard workout or strenuous event.

Colic: Always call your veterinary practitioner if your horse shows

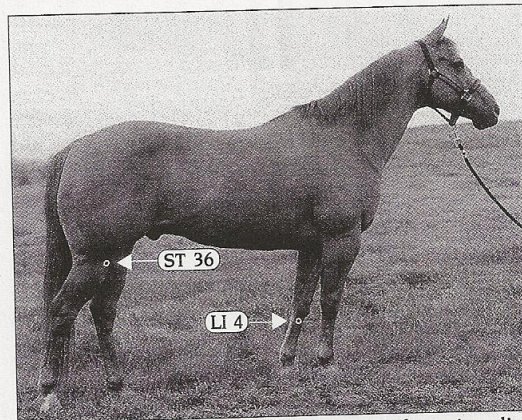
signs of colic. While you are waiting for his or her arrival, moxa may be appropriate as well as massage. Moxa is well suited to relieving the Cold form of colic — the horse with depressed gut sounds, cold ears, nose, and extremities, pale gums, purplish tongue, and a gooey wetness in the mouth. This horse will have a weak, chilly, and lethargic demeanor.

In these cases, use the moxa to stimulate the master acupuncture point, Stomach 36. The point is found about a hand's width below the stifle just to the outside of the front-most surface of the rear leg. Be sure to moxa both sides of the body. (See photo below and "Earthy Delight," TWHJ, September/October 1996, for more information on this incredibly powerful acupuncture point.)

This Cold type of colic contrasts with the "Hot" type, such as that caused by salmonella. The horse with a "Hot" colic would be feverish and agitated with overactive gut sounds and a red and inflamed tongue and gums. Moxa should not be used on this type of condition.

Diarrhea: Another gastro-intestinal problem that can be relieved by moxa is the Cold type of diarrhea, especially chronic cases where the bowel is sterile. This horse is weak and ill with a poor appetite. This would contrast with the horse a form of diarrhea caused by a Hot condition; this horse would be feverish and agitated.

Along with other treatments suggested by your veterinarian, use moxa on Stomach 36 on a regular basis to help the body heal.



Important Points – Use Large Intestine 4 for pain relief in the front half of the body and immune stimulation. Use Stomach 36 for "Cold" colics, immune stimulation and balancing energy levels.

Finishing Up

When you are done, take tin foil and carefully wrap it around the top half of the stick. This works like a candle snuffer, putting out the fire by taking away the oxygen necessary for combustion. This method is handy for storage as it keeps the burnt end of the moxa stick from smudging everything. Store the moxa in a dry container in a dark, dry place. To avoid having the herbs mold, periodically dry your moxa sticks out in the sun. It is said that the older the moxa is, the better it works, so don't hesitate to buy a few extra sticks to keep on hand. Overall, moxa is just one more wonderful tool to help keep your horse happy and healthy.

As you experiment, you will find its uses to be endless. Moxa is yet another example of how the unusual, non-invasive and inexpensive therapies from ancient times can help the modern horse stay healthy.

Common Sense Cautions

Although the proper use of moxa is simple and safe, there are a few important cautions that must be noted. Please read them carefully. Then go ahead and use moxa to your heart's- and your horse's- delight!

1) Before using moxa in a public barn, be sure to communicate to the management about the practice FIRST. Remember that smoke of any kind can cause panic in a barn. Avoid this scenario by offering to demonstrate the practice to concerned management, showing how you dispose of the ashes in water etc.

2) As it burns, the stick of moxa creates an ash much like a cigar or cigarette. This ash covers the burning ember, interfering with the heat. Regularly flick the ashes off into an ash tray or a bucket of water. Every so often the ember will break off and fall to the ground - immediately crush it out with your foot or douse with water.

3) BE CAREFUL ABOUT FIRE DANGER. Conscientiously dispose the ashes in a heat proof container. Dr. Fleming suggests always having a bucket of water present for ashes or burns. Always work in an area that is free of straw or shavings. If you must work inside, stand the horse on hard dirt or concrete surfaces. When you are finished, make sure the ember on the end of the stick is completely out and cool before you put the moxa away. You can extinguish the moxa stick by suffocating the ember with a home-made tinfoil cap (See photo page 17), stubbing it out in an ashtray-like surface, or snipping the ember off into the bucket of water.

4) Avoid the possibility of singeing the horse's hair with the ember by always keeping your free hand on the horse near the site

you are treating. This allows you to monitor the heat buildup. If by mistake you brush your horse with the ember it will generally only singe the hair. In the very unlikely case of a burn, treat it promptly.

5) Work in a well-ventilated area so the moxa smoke can dissipate easily. The smoke from moxa can smell to some like marijuana although they are not related plants. If you use moxa in a public place, communicate to your neighbors about what you are doing so there is no confusion.

7) Although moxa is very safe, children should not use it without adult supervision.

Medical Cautions

8) Do not use moxa with extremely weak horses or pregnant mares without consulting your veterinary acupuncturist.

9) Do not use moxa over open wounds, puncture wounds or any skin conditions.

10) Do not use moxa on acute inflammatory conditions such as a swollen area from a recent kick or a hot swelling on the leg. Moxa is also not indicated for infectious conditions such as an abscess. These conditions are considered "Hot" conditions

in Traditional Chinese Medicine and do not need the application of further heat. Also discontinue use of the moxa if an area becomes swollen (inflamed) after a moxa treatment.

11) Do not use moxa on unconscious animals or over numb areas like a leg that has been nerved. Similarly, do not use moxa on a frostbitten area of the body until it has been warmed slightly with other means.

12) Do not use moxa on delicate areas. Examples include: the face, the eyes, genitals, udders, prominent tendons, large blood vessels, the umbilicus of a newborn foal.

13) Discontinue use on a horse who becomes fidgety or impatient. These signs indicate moxa is not the best therapy at this time or that the session has gone on too long.

14) You probably won't want to use moxa on a horse about to perform in a competitive event. Moxa is a strong sedative and although it might help the horse relax, the biggest concern would be that the horse would become TOO relaxed and not perform at his peak. Save the moxa for afterwards when the moxa will be a wonderful reward like a hot tub after hard work. ☺

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