



Sharpening Your Hoof Knife

By John McNerney

A common question asked by trimmers is: How do I keep my hoof knife sharp? There are many methods that can be used; however, this article will discuss the use of buffing wheels. Buffing wheels are a fast and effective method for keeping a sharp edge on your knives.

The materials you will need include:

- Two cloth wheels
- Jackson Lea Greaseless Abrasive - 300 Grit
- White Matchless buff compound
- 6" or 8" Bench Grinder
- Safety glasses
- Cup and old paint brush
- Gloves

All of the these materials can be purchased from your local shoeing supply store or from an abrasive supply company.



When working with knives it is important to understand the design of a hoof knife. A hoof knife is designed to have a beveled blade; that is, the front side is tapered while the back side is relatively flat, when viewing a cross section of the blade. When sharpening your hoof knife, you must keep this fact in mind and concentrate your sharpening on the front side of the blade. In addition, you want the bevel of the blade to form a straight line from spine to edge and you should avoid creating a "dome" in the center of the blade. The buffing wheel is a great tool for sharpening your knife because the radius on the wheel eliminates the "dome" in the blade when the proper abrasive compounds are used.

First, apply the red Jackson-Lea greaseless abrasive to one of the wheels of your bench grinder. This compound is a heavier grit and will be used to start sharpening your knife. On a new wheel it is hard to get the red compound to stick. The best way to apply the abrasive is to cut off a small section and melt it in an old cup in the microwave for 10 to 15 seconds or until liquefied. Use a brush to apply the compound on the wheel as evenly as possible and let it dry. The goal is to get a solid base of compound on the wheel. (Figure 1). It is best to reapply the compound in between sharpening each knife. Once you have established a good base of the red compound, you can add compound in the nor-



Figure 1

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mal fashion, by running the tube of compound up against the wheel with the grinder running. Once the compound is applied and dry you can sharpen your knife. For safety reasons always make sure that you are sharpening the knife with the direction of the wheel and not against it. Figure 2 shows the knife being sharpened with the edge of the blade facing up, in the direction that the wheel is turning (correct). Be careful because cloth wheels can grab the knife out of your hands. Pay attention and be safe.

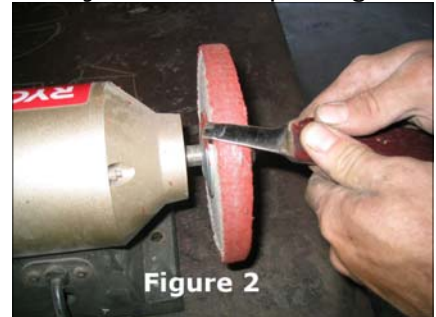


Figure 2

To sharpen your knife:

1). Start on the wheel with the red compound. Work the front of the blade with the direction of the wheel from hook to base (Figure 2).

2). Next, work the back side of the blade, again moving from the hook to the base (Figure 3).

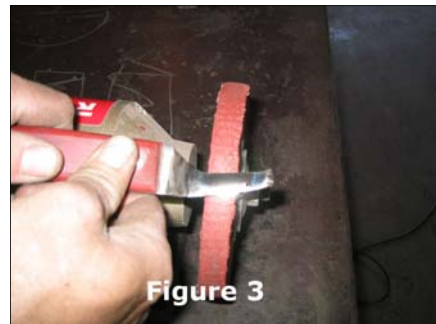


Figure 3

3). Then work the hook itself (be careful not to let the wheel catch the knife) (Figure 4).

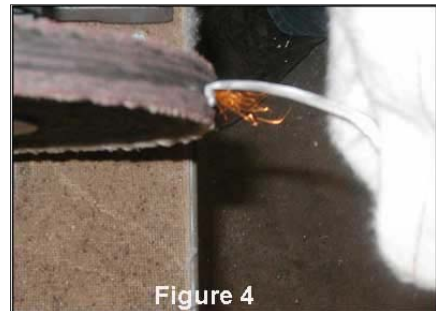


Figure 4

4). To put the final edge and polish on your knife, use the white buffing compound on the other wheel of your grinder. Repeat the same steps used with the red compound (Figure 5 and 6).



Figure 5

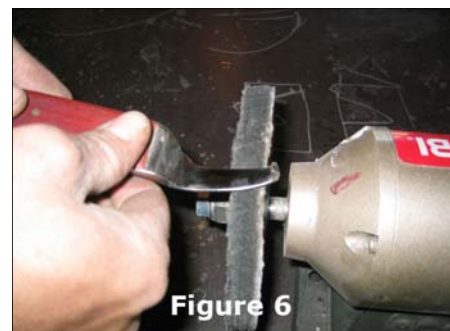


Figure 6

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5). Check for sharpness and repeat if necessary.

6). To get this technique to work, you must hold the knife as flat as possible to the wheel. Be very careful not to catch the back edge of the knife to the wheel. If the wheel catches the back edge of the knife it will rip it out of your hand. The cutting part of the knife must be thin to be sharp, that is the secret.

Note: Buffing wheels will heat the blade up. If your knives have been heat treated, periodically dunk the blade in water to keep the blade cool. You do not have to do this if the blades are made from air-cooled alloys.

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