



presented by the **American Youth Horse Council**

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**help kids connect through horses**

## Basic Horse Care

**Horse ownership is a big responsibility but the rewards can be many. Horses require both time and money for proper upkeep. This pamphlet is designed to help new or inexperienced horse owners understand the responsibility to care for a horse.**

*Before purchasing or taking ownership of a horse, information should be gathered on such things as breeds of horses, temperament, styles of riding and age of a horse to buy. The level of training of the horse will be important to a new owner. Have a horse expert evaluate the horse for suitability. Those new to the horse world may first want to get some horseback riding experience before making the decision to purchase. Before taking the ownership plunge, leasing a horse is an option, to be sure this is the correct decision. Ask the seller about any injury or sickness the horse may have had. Pay to have a veterinarian conduct a pre-purchase examination of the horse to assess health and soundness related conditions. These experts do this work for a living and there are charges, so ask in advance what costs are involved.*

### Housing

Space and facilities can be a limiting factor to horse ownership. Horses need some protection from the elements. This can vary from a three-sided shed in the corner of a pasture or corral to a complete stable with box stalls. Horses without shelter will require more feed in cold weather and more water in hot weather to maintain good health and body condition.

### Required Space

Horses need some area to exercise and move about such as a corral, dry lot or pasture. Shelter or barn can be a box stall 10' x 10' to 12' x 12', barn ceiling height 8' minimum (depending on the size of the animal), door 4' wide x 8' high. Preferred stable flooring is clay dirt.

### Fencing

Fencing for horses can vary from traditional board or rail fence to electric wire. The important thing is that the fence be visible to the horse to keep them from running through it or entangling themselves in it. If

using electric fence use the wide ribbon wire, which is visible to the horse. One single "hot" wire is not enough to keep horses in the pasture and off the highway. Barbed wire should be avoided.

Your horse facility should be kept clean and in good repair. Make sure the stable is well ventilated with no drafts. Regardless of where you keep your horse, always be alert for loose boards, nails and any projections that could cause injury. Keep all wire and hay-bale twine picked up so horses don't ingest them. This will reduce health problems and injuries.

### Disposal or Composting of Manure

You must have a plan for manure disposal or use. Develop a composting project to convert manure and yard waste into a product that will return its nutrients to the soil. This composted organic matter can be used in the garden, landscape or crop fields. Fly and insect control also needs to be addressed. Contact your county cooperative Extension Service for composting information.

### Feeding and Nutrition

An average saddle horse (1000 lbs. body weight) will consume approximately 15 to 20 pounds of a combination of hay, pasture and grain (total ration) each day. The major component of a horse's diet is good forage such as alfalfa, grass hay or pasture. Many horses can get their daily nutritional requirements from grazing in a pasture. A mature horse that is not being ridden or worked can be fed a diet consisting of forage (hay or pasture) and given access to a salt or mineral block. Grain mix (generally oats and corn) should be added to the diet as the horse's training, work and activity is increased. Young and old horses will need some grain in their diet to increase needed calories.

### Pastures

Before turning a horse out to pasture for the first time, you must condition it to a change in diet. Turning the horse out on green lush pasture is dangerous. It can result in founder, colic and/or death. Start out slowly, grazing a few minutes to a few hours a day and increasing over time.



### **Dry land Pastures – Calculating Stocking Rates for Horses**

Generally, a horse weighing 1,000 lbs. consumes 500 lbs. of forage each month. Each region is different depending on amount of rainfall, soil composition, etc. For example, non-irrigated pasture in Colorado can produce 500 to 2000 pounds of forage per acre/year depending on rainfall, soil type and species of plants. Check with your local county Extension Service to find out about pastures in your area. To make sure your pasture stays healthy; horses cannot over graze the grasses.

Limit grazing (several hours per day) combined with supplemental feeding on smaller acreage to extend the length of the grazing season. Horses should be turned out for exercise and some grazing. They will need to be held in a box stall or a corral for the period of time they are not on pasture. During periods of snow cover and when no forage is available, supplemental hay must be fed to the horse. Continuous grazing of pasture on limited acreage may require a recovery period of no grazing to maintain forage health and vigor. Over grazed dry land pasture may never recover.

### **Irrigated Pasture**

Irrigated pastures that receive adequate moisture will grow more forage than dry land pasture. Therefore, less acreage is needed to meet the grazing needs of the horse. Again, the soil type, species of plants, amount of water, fertilization and management are factors that can increase irrigated pasture production. Generally irrigated pastures yield 3 to 5 tons per acre a year. Only a portion of the total yield produced will be eaten by the horse. Grass that is trampled and defecated on will not be consumed. Also, a certain amount of grass must be left to maintain a good quality re-growth. This portion is about 30% for grass. The acreage needed for irrigated pasture range from 0.7 to 1.2 acre/horse. Again limited grazing hours combined with supplemental feeding on smaller acreage will extend the length of the grazing season. You must supplement with hay during periods of snow cover or when feed is not available. Over grazed irrigated pasture will have a hard time recovering.

You must manage your pasture as a crop. Fertilize pastures each spring by following the recommendations from a soil test. Drag or pick up manure, clip weeds and monitor the pasture for over and under-grazing. Contact your county extension

service for information on soil testing and management.

### **Hay**

If you are purchasing hay, a small rectangle bale of hay can range between 45 and 85 pounds per bale. The amount of hay to purchase and feed should be based on weight of the bales and nutrient value. Younger horses and high performance horses do well on alfalfa (legume) hays or grass/legume mixes. Younger horses, lactating brood mares and high performance horses require higher nutrients as would be available in alfalfa hay.

#### Calculating the number of 50 lb. bales to purchase in a season.

$$\begin{aligned} 365 \text{ days/year} \times 20 \text{ lbs. per horse required/day} \\ = 7300 \text{ lbs. needed} \div 50 \text{ lbs. /bale} \\ = 146 \text{ bales needed/year} \end{aligned}$$

### **Quick Facts about Hay**

\*Legume (alfalfa and clover) hay is higher in protein and energy than grass hay; therefore, you need to feed more (weight) grass hay than legumes. Grass hay will keep the horse busy eating longer, preventing boredom.

\*Second and third cutting hays are higher in protein and energy than first cutting. However, horses only need 10-12% protein in their feed; second and third cutting alfalfa hay can average 18-24% protein. This hay is also more expensive.

\*Have your hay analyzed to determine the nutrient value. Feed accordingly.

\*Weeds have limited nutritional value; weed seeds can be passed through the manure and infest your pasture, buy hay that does not contain many weeds. Some weeds are poisonous to horses.

\*Hay for horses must be mold and dust free.

### **Water**

A horse must have ample clean, fresh water available at all times. A horse will drink 10 to 12 gallons of water per day depending on temperature, humidity levels, ration content and workload. In the winter months, stock tank heaters will help prevent ice build-up and make water accessible to animals.



### **Health Care (Minimum Requirements)**

Locate a veterinarian to consult with on health care maintenance. It is critical that you develop a client relationship with a veterinarian prior to an emergency situation. Using a veterinarian for routine health visits can easily do this.

- Your state's Horse Council and Department of Agriculture
- Your state's Brand Inspection Office

### **Dental Care**

Teeth should be checked and floated at least once a year by a qualified person.

### **Vaccinations**

All horses should be vaccinated at least once a year (spring). Age, intended use, individual health and time of year influence the risk for infectious disease and the vaccination program that is needed. Check with your veterinarian.

### **Internal Parasite Control**

A horse should be paste de-wormed 4 to 6 times a year. The frequency of treatment varies with use, concentration of horses and where they are housed. A daily fed product can also be used to control parasites. Contact your local veterinarian for recommendation.

### **First Aid**

Contact a veterinarian any time the horse appears sick, disoriented or has been injured.

### **Foot Care**

Hooves should be trimmed every six to eight weeks. Contact a qualified farrier (horseshoer). Clean out the hooves every time before and after you ride. Examine them regularly for problems.

### **Transporting and Ownership**

Some states require a brand inspection certificate as proof of ownership, at the time of sale. Also a brand inspection certificate might be needed if a horse is transported more than 75 miles from home or leaving the state. Most states also require a negative Coggins test for horses transported across the state line.

### **Get to Know Your Equine Professionals**

- The Veterinary Medical Association in your state
- American Association of Equine Practitioners: 1.800.443.0177
- Your local Farriers Association
- Contact your County Extension Service and 4-H Youth program

*Material adapted from Colorado and Pennsylvania's Cooperative Extension Service publication on Horse Care.*