



How Should I Feed My Horse This Winter?

Getting Your Horse through the Hard Months

As discussed in the blanketing article, horses' critical ambient temperature is 45°F. This means that in temperatures below 45°F, a horse must expend more energy to maintain his body temperature. For each 1°F below 45°F, you must increase your horse's intake of digestible energy by 1%. For Example, if your horse normally eats 7 pounds of grass hay and 2 pounds of grain twice daily, you must increase his hay intake by 1.5 pounds per feeding for every 10°F below 45°F.

The most important component of any horse's diet is forage. Forage is supplied to the horse in two major components, grass and hay. Grass is the most important source of forage for horses, but unfortunately is not available in any measurable amount in the winter months. Therefore, this lack of calories and fiber must be compensated for in other ways. The safest and most beneficial way is to replace this missing component with another forage source, hay. Grass hay is the safest and healthiest choice for forage for your horse; typically timothy, orchard, fescue or any mix of these is preferred (note: Fescue is safe for horses as long as they are not pregnant mares. Please do not feed fescue to pregnant mares). Your horse should be consuming a minimum of 1.5-2% of his body weight in hay every day. This means that a 1000lb horse should be eating at least 15-20lb of hay, or half a square bale, every day just to maintain his weight. Please remember that this must be increased by 1% for every 1°F below 45°F. In addition to the calories, hay maintains body heat in the intestines, located in the center of the body, thus aiding in the maintenance of core body temperature.

If your horse is on a concentrate, or feed, this should be continued through the winter. Geriatric patients tend to have the most difficulty maintaining weight throughout the cold. We recommend keeping hard-keepers or elderly horses on a complete senior feed such as Purina Equine Senior, Nutrena Life Design Senior or Triple Crown Senior. These are considered "complete" feeds, meaning that all of the nutritional requirements of the horse can be met on it alone, in the case of poor dentition limiting forage intake. Forage should still be provided. Large amounts of these feeds can be safely given if necessary.

Always provide fresh water for your horses during the winter months. Consider water heaters in order to prevent freezing of clean water sources. Older horses with sensitive teeth may consume more water in the cold months if provided with heated water. Also make sure both a salt and a mineral block are provided free choice to all animals.



If you are having trouble keeping weight on your horse this winter, please look closely at the blanketing article for tips. Your horse may be expending large amounts of energy in an effort to stay warm. If you have any questions at all, please contact us.