

A publication for horse owners

The Equine Life

NUTRITION • HEALTH • CARE • TRAINING

Feeding and management of horses in winter

Amy M. Gill, Ph.D.

Cold, blustery, wet winter weather can present some tough feeding and management situations for horse owners and their horses. No one enjoys hiking up to the barn when the weather outside is miserable, and horses seem particularly crabby and uncomfortable when the temperature dips below their comfort zone. Fortunately, good planning in conjunction with quality feeds and facilities can make the transition from warm autumn days into wintry nights a little less difficult for all involved.

One of the most productive ways of keeping horses warm and comfortable is to provide free choice, good quality hay. As a grazing herbivore and hind gut fermenter, the horse has an internal furnace that can continually produce heat for maintaining body temperature so long as the source of that heat, fiber, is available. The heat of fermentation when the hay is digested by microbes in the horse's hindgut is the main source of warmth for the horse. The heat is produced during the biochemical conversion of fiber into volatile fatty acids (VFA's). During a very cold spell, it is even OK to feed a lesser quality hay than normal, as the higher fiber content of this type of hay provides more fuel to the microbial populations. This is a great time of year to use up some of that older more mature hay that got a little too long before it was harvested!

Some horses will require additional supplementation to keep condition. Be sure to choose a concentrate that is specifically

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How to be your Veterinarian's best client

Cindy Carruthers
Agway Territory Manager

Do you feel you and your equine companion get great care from your veterinarian?
Do you get a quick response from your veterinarian in an emergency situation?
Do you feel your veterinarian properly addresses your concerns as a horse owner?

Large animal veterinarians are becoming harder and harder to find. A good veterinarian is worth their weight in gold. Here are

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How to be your Veterinarian's best client

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some recommendations on how to develop and maintain a great relationship with your veterinarian.

- **Know your horse.** Know their habits and recognize signs of trouble. Learn to detect problems as they are occurring, not when they are too far advanced. Know basic first aid, such as pulse, respiration, signs of dehydration, how to stop bleeding, etc. Know how to take your horse's temperature and know what signs indicate problems with a horse's health. Keep a basic first aid kit handy for emergency situations. Look at your horse daily and observe manure and urine output. Know what is normal for your horse. Check regularly for cuts and scratches. If your horse is blanketed in the wintertime, remove the blanket daily and look for signs of weight loss or injury. These steps will earn your veterinarian's respect for you as a competent horse owner who knows what to look for and pay attention to.
- **Maintain a consistent program for your horse** as far as feeding, deworming,

shoeing, vaccinations, etc. Regular maintenance helps to avoid emergency calls.

- **Do not wait to call your veterinarian** for problems that need immediate attention. Many wounds need to be stitched before the edges dry out and cannot be stitched. It is always better to treat wounds before infection occurs. If your horse shows signs of lameness on Wednesday, don't wait until Saturday to decide it's time for the veterinarian to see him. Likewise, if your horse seems colicky at dinnertime, don't wait until midnight for that emergency call.
- **If your veterinarian chooses to restrain or sedate your horse, let them.** If they feel it is necessary to use a twitch or a chain over your horse's lip in order to avoid injury to the horse or themselves, please respect their opinion. They see horses all day long and understand the reactions horses can have to both pain and or fear.
- **Pay your bill.** This may seem simple but many times it is overlooked. Horses are

not inexpensive animals and veterinary bills are some of the biggest costs in horse care. Just like you appreciate being paid for your labor, so does your vet. If funds are tight or your bill is bigger than your budget, most veterinarians accept credit cards or offer sources like Care Credit that provide financing for veterinary bills. Veterinarians work hard to earn a living and deserve to be paid just like you. It is expensive to put a fully stocked truck on the road and pay to fuel it.

- **Remember your veterinarian is human, too.** They work long hours in unpleasant working conditions at times. They are on the road in bad weather, heat, cold and the dead of night, many times dealing with cases that could have been avoided or resolved better if human owners would have called sooner. They see horses and their owners in the worst of situations at times and deal with death on a daily basis. Sometimes a little consideration goes a long way!

Feeding and management of horses in winter

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designed for the type of horse being fed and always introduce a new feed slowly over a 7 -10 day period. It is also very important to group similar types of horses in a field so that feeding time is less stressful. All horses should be treated as individuals and amount and type of feedstuffs utilized should be customized for each horse.

Some type of shelter to provide protection from wind, rain and ice should be available to pastured horses. Wet horses lose body heat very quickly as the wind increases and temperatures drop. Snow is not as hard on horses as an icy rain because a layer of snow on the horses back acts as an insulator. Horses that are continuously exposed to wet weather are very hard to keep weight on since much of the energy

derived from feed is diverted to producing body heat. If you notice a horse shivering, it is doing all it can to try to keep its body heat constant. Bring the horse inside for a while, throw a wool blanket over it and feed it some hay. Feeding hay in shelters is a great way to train horses to come in out of the weather to eat. Using hay bags or racks helps to keep the forage off the ground where it can get wet and trampled.

Make sure the source of water in a pasture remains viable. Horses prefer tepid water to ice cold or slushy water, so tank heaters should be used if automatic heated waterers are not available. Colic occurs more often in winter when horses are eating a lot of forage and then not drinking much water. It is imperative that timid horses out in large herds are not run off by more dom-

inant pasture mates. If more than five horses share a water source, setting up another tank may be beneficial, to ensure all horses have access to water at all times.

Blanketing helps older or infirm horses to maintain body weight. Blanketing is mandatory for horses that have been body clipped. Blanketed horses should have the blanket removed and be groomed on a DAILY basis. Horses get very itchy from wearing blankets continuously and sores can develop from dirt, grit, stones etc.

With a little foresight, good quality forage and concentrates, shelter, water and some blankets, horses and humans alike can weather the winter!

Superior Senior Testimonial - Heritage Farm

Heritage Farm is a custom boarding facility in Trappe, Pennsylvania that caters to its equine residents and their owner's specific needs. Gary and Alice Cochran provide custom care for their boarder's individual needs and have been feeding Agway Superior Feeds since their introduction. Fanaro Bros. Farm, Home and Garden in Collegetown, Pennsylvania provide the Cochran's and their boarders with exceptional service as well as offering the Agway Superior Feed line.

Heritage Farm has two full-time residents who are proving that age should not be a deterring factor in choosing an older horse as your equine partner. These horses are excellent examples that with proper care and attention, age is not a problem!

Red is a 29 year old Quarter Horse gelding who is owned by 8 year old Stephanie Hedin. Just by looking at



Red

his picture, you would never guess his advanced age. He was chosen as Stephanie's mount due to his kind,

easy going temperament and experience. It is the kind of experience that comes with age. Red is fed a diet of Agway Superior Senior and timothy cubes mixed with water to help with his age related dental problems. His weight is excellent and his coat and mane are showing all the signs of great health. Red and Stephanie are well matched and enjoy spending time with each other.

Derby is the other senior resident at Heritage Farm. He is a 27 year old that came from Bran Manor Equine Rescue and has blossomed with the love and care of his owner Megan Crain and the individual feeding program provided by the Cochran's. Derby is also fed Agway Superior Senior and has shown great

results from his individual feeding program. Megan is a junior at Perkiomen Valley High School and

will be using Derby for the completion of her Senior Project for graduation.

Both of these remarkable horses



Derby

have much to teach their owners from their life experience. With the proper care and maintenance they receive from Gary and Alice at Heritage Farm and the love and attention of Stephanie and Megan, they will continue to be safe and steady partners for years to come.

No hour of life is lost that is spent in the saddle.

-Winston Churchill

Send us your Superior story!

What improvements have you seen in your horse since you started using Agway Superior horse feed?

We'd love to hear your personal stories and successes. More importantly, we'd love to share them with the rest of our Equine Life readers!

Send us a typed letter or email along with your horse's before and after pictures. Tell us the changes you've

seen in your horse and why you love Agway Superior feeds.

If we decide to print your Superior testimonial we'll send you a voucher for free Agway Superior feed!

All entries must be received by December 30, 2005 to qualify for our free feed offer.

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Testimonials and corresponding photos can be mailed or emailed to:

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