

HOW TO GET YOUR HORSE WINTER-READY?

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WITH THE ARRIVAL OF FALL AND THE REFRESHING CHILL IN THE AIR, IT'S A SURE SIGN—WINTER IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER!

WHETHER YOU LIVE IN FRIGID CLIMATES OR AREAS WITH RAINY, CHILLY WEATHER, WINTER CAN POSE CHALLENGES FOR HORSES. THANKFULLY, HEALTHY HORSES HAVE NATURAL DEFENSES, LIKE GROWING A THICK COAT AND INCREASING BODY FAT. NEVERTHELESS, THEY STILL NEED EXTRA CARE TO MAINTAIN THEIR HEALTH DURING THIS DEMANDING SEASON. WITH TEMPERATURES DROPPING, NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME TO ASSESS YOUR HORSE AND PREPARE FOR THE COLD AHEAD.





CONDITION CHECK

Start your winter preparations by evaluating your horse's body condition score (**BCS**). This score ranges from 1 to 9, with a score of around 5 indicating a healthy weight. Consult your veterinarian for an accurate assessment, considering factors like your horse's age, recent activities, injuries, and overall mental state.

FEEDING

Monitoring your horse's BCS helps determine its dietary needs. Is your horse gaining weight, losing it, or maintaining an ideal condition? Adequate body fat is crucial for insulation during winter. Check areas like the neck, ribs, and hips for fat coverage. For horses below a BCS of 5, increase caloric intake by adding more hay and grains. Stock up on high-quality hay in the fall to avoid shortages later.

WATERING

Proper hydration is key to encouraging your horse to eat enough hay and grains. Cold, frozen water can deter drinking and lead to dehydration. Studies show that warm water increases intake, so aim to keep water sources unfrozen and ideally warm (**around 39°F or 4°C**).

CLIPPING

A healthy horse naturally grows a thicker coat and longer hair in the fall to stay warm during winter. However, if the coat gets wet from sweat or rain, it can pose a serious risk for the horse when left outside. For horses that will be worked hard and kept warm with blankets, clipping their long hair can promote better health. Conversely, if a horse will spend a lot of time in the pasture without much exertion or if it's older and struggles to cope with the cold, it's best to allow it to keep its winter coat.

BLANKETING

When deciding on blanketing, consider your horse's coat, age, body condition, shelter, and local climate. A good winter coat typically suffices, but clipped horses or those in poor health may need additional warmth. Ensure your horse is dry before blanketing, and regularly check under the blanket for skin conditions.

SHELTERING

Horses in pastures must have access to shelter to escape harsh weather. Options include natural shelters like trees or constructed run-in sheds. Ensure shelters are spacious enough for all horses and consider multiple shelters if your herd has a hierarchy.

DENTAL CHECK

Winter diets often consist of dry feed, making dental health even more critical. Schedule a dental checkup before winter to ensure your horse can chew effectively, aiding digestion.



HOOF CARE

Regular hoof care is vital to prevent injuries. Schedule a farrier visit before winter to determine the best shoeing options for your area. Inspect the stability of stall floors and check hooves daily to prevent issues from snow or wet conditions.

EXERCISING

Cold weather can reduce motivation for exercise, but maintaining a regular light exercise routine is essential for your horse's fitness. Identify safe riding areas and prepare the ground to prevent injuries due to ice. Warm-up and cool-down sessions are particularly important in low temperatures, so consider using indoor facilities if available. 