

## What is a forage-based diet for horses?

A **forage-based diet** is one where the bulk of daily intake is made up of fibrous forage including **hay**, **haylage** or **grazing**. For many horses, forage ought to be the basis of the diet because it supports gut health, supplies reliable **digestible fibre**, and encourages natural eating behaviour. This strategy follows **forage-first feeding**, which seeks to provide as much of its nutritional needs as possible via roughage before adding any additional horse feed.

A practical benefit is that forage offers a horse something to chew on for more time, which can support salivation and digestive function. This is important because the equine digestive system is **overweight horse feed** made for almost continuous intake of fibrous feed. A forage-led diet often provide steadier **energy density** than highly concentrated feed, which may be helpful for horses that do not need large amounts of supplemental energy.

That said, forage is not always fully balanced on its own. The quality of hay, haylage, and grazing can vary widely, affecting **nutrient balance**, **vitamins and minerals**, and total **calorie intake**. For this reason two horses on the same kind of forage-based diet may need different amounts of horse feed, or not any at all.

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## At what point does a horse need feed beyond forage?

Extra **horse feed** becomes useful when forage alone does not meet the horse's **energy requirements**, nutrient needs, or condition goals. The clearest sign is a mismatch between what the horse is eating and how it looks or performs. At this point **body condition score** and **workload** become the most useful decision tools.

A horse in light work with good-quality hay and a healthy body condition may need little more than a **balancer** or a small top-up. On the other hand, a horse in harder work, growing horses, older horses with poorer teeth, or horses with low appetite may need additional calories and nutrients from carefully chosen feed. The aim is not to add feed automatically, but to match the ration to the horse's real needs.

Consider these practical indicators:

- If weight is dropping, forage intake may be too low or too poor in quality.
- If body fat is increasing, the issue may be excess calories from forage, hard feed, or both.
- If the horse is working harder, **performance needs** rise and forage alone may no longer be enough.
- If there are coat, muscle, or recovery concerns, the ration may lack key nutrients even if the horse looks well.

Put simply, horse feed is needed when forage no longer fully covers the horse's **nutritional needs** for health, condition, and activity.

## Types of horse feed to use with forage

There are various **types of horse feed** that can be combined with forage, and choosing the best one depends on the horse's condition, workload, and digestive tolerance. The main options include a **complete horse feed**, a **balancer**, and traditional **concentrates**.

A **complete horse feed** is formulated to provide roughage, energy, vitamins and minerals in one product. It can be useful for owners who want a simple daily ration in a feed bucket without having to build multiple layers of supplements. Many complete feeds are formulated to be **low starch**, which may suit horses that are sensitive to high cereal levels.

A **balancer**, also called a **ration balancer**, is a concentrated nutrient source rather than a high-calorie feed. It is ideal for horses on good forage who need vitamins and minerals, quality protein, and support for nutrient balance without extra bulk or much energy. This can be especially useful for easy keepers.

**Concentrates** are more energy-rich feeds that often provide additional energy for horses with higher workload or greater calorie demand. They can be appropriate when forage quality or quantity is not enough, but they should be used carefully because of their higher starch or overall energy load.

The best option depends on the horse, not the label. For some horses, a balancer and forage are enough. For others, a complete feed is simpler. For higher demands, concentrates may be needed, but they should still sit within a forage-led plan.

## How to select horse feed for beginners

For **horse feed for beginners**, the easiest way to prioritise forage, then choose feed based on **digestibility**, **fibre**, and **starch** levels. Beginners often overcomplicate feeding, but the most reliable method is to start with the horse's body condition, work level, and forage quality.

Highly digestible feed can help the horse use nutrients more efficiently, which is useful if the horse has a modest appetite or needs a calm source of energy. Fibre needs to be the foundation of the diet because it supports gut health and offers slower-release calories. This is why many modern feeds focus on **digestible fibre laminitis feed** fibre-based formulations rather than cereal-heavy mixes.

Be mindful of starch. High-starch feeds can deliver quick energy, but they are not always the best fit for every horse, particularly those prone to sharp behaviour, digestive upset, or weight gain. Low-starch options are often easier to fit into a forage-first feeding plan.

If you are not sure how to start, choose the least complicated ration that meets the horse's needs: good forage, a sensible balancer if required, and only enough extra feed to support condition and work.

## Horse feeding rules every owner should follow

Effective **horse feeding rules** are simple, steady, and centered on the horse's gut function. The aim behind the **10 rules of feeding horses** is not absolute perfection, but sensible habits that minimize risk and promote wellbeing.

- Base the ration on roughage first.
- Use **ad-lib forage** where appropriate and suitable for the horse's state.
- Feed **small meals** rather than heavy bucket feeds.
- Introduce any change gradually.
- Tailor feed to **body condition score** and **workload**.
- Keep clean water is always available.
- Set feeding times regular.
- Prevent sudden increases in **starch**.

- Check dung, appetite, coat, and weight regularly.
- Reassess the ration whenever the horse's work or forage quality changes.

These rules promote gut health and lower the chance of digestive upset. They also help owners prevent feeding by habit rather than need. In a forage-based diet, the ration should be steady, purposeful, and simple for the horse to process.

## How much horse feed should you provide?

There is no single answer to how much **horse feed** a horse should have, because the appropriate amount depends on **bodyweight**, forage intake, condition, and activity. A **horse feeding chart** can give a starting point, but it should never replace careful monitoring of the individual horse.

A **horse feed calculator uk** can be useful for setting a daily ration, especially when you need to work from **bodyweight** and estimate energy needs. It can help you identify whether the horse is likely to need only forage, a balancer, or a more substantial feed. Even so, calculators are resources, not final answers. They are only as good as the information entered, especially if forage analysis or accurate weight estimates are missing.

Forage intake matters just as much as bagged feed. A horse eating enough hay or grazing may need very little additional energy. Another horse on limited forage may need a carefully measured horse feed top-up to avoid falling short on calories and nutrients. This is why many owners find it helpful to review the ration in stages: first forage, then nutrient balance, then extra calories if needed.

If you are unsure, assess the horse's current body condition, estimate forage intake, and then add feed only to fill the gap. That approach prevents overfeeding and keeps the ration aligned with the horse's actual needs.

## What makes a complete horse feed?

A **complete horse feed** is a product designed to supply something beyond calories. It usually contains **vitamins and minerals**, a **source of fibre**, and a balanced energy profile, often with **low starch** levels relative to traditional cereal-based feeds. It is intended to simplify the ration by merging several components into one product.

For a lot of owners, the appeal of a complete feed is simplicity. It can suit many cases when you want to feed from a one bucket without adding extra ingredients. The fiber source helps promote gut health, while the vitamins and minerals help to close frequent nutrient gaps in a forage led diet.

That said, complete does not always mean perfect for every horse. The feed still needs to meet the horse's **energy requirements**, digestibility needs, and appetite. A horse that thrives on forage and a balancer may not need a complete feed at all. Another horse with a higher workload may gain from one if it supplies enough calories without too much starch.

## Horse feed cost: what influences the price?

**Horse feed cost** varies because not all feeds are made in the same manner. The main factors are **ingredient quality**, formula design, production, brand positioning, and **bag size**. More advanced feeds may cost more because they use selected ingredients or added nutrient support.

**Horse feed companies** frequently price products based on nutrition concentration and the quantity required each day. A feed with a more elevated feed rate may seem cheaper per bag, but the real daily cost may be higher. A more concentrated balancer or complete feed may appear expensive at first, yet lower daily amounts can make it cost-effective overall.

Component quality is important because it impacts digestive efficiency, taste acceptance, and nutrient delivery. If a feed is designed for better fibre digestion or reduced starch, that can affect the price. Bag size also alters the comparison: bulk bags may lower the cost per kilo, but only if the horse will use the product before it goes stale or becomes inconvenient.

To assess value properly, calculate in daily intake terms, not just bag price.

## Horse feed advice: matching ration to condition and work level

Practical **horse feed advice uk** begins with **condition scoring**. Once you know whether the horse is underweight, at a healthy weight, or carrying extra weight, it becomes much easier to decide whether to raise or reduce the ration. Pair this with workload and you can build a much more reliable feeding plan.

A **performance horse** usually needs higher energy levels, better nutrient support, and sometimes a feed with greater calorie density than a leisure horse. However, not every performance horse needs a high level of concentrates. Some do well on premium forage, a balancer, and a small additional ration that supports recovery and work without making the horse too fizzy.

An **easy keeper** is the other challenge. These horses often maintain condition well, sometimes overly well, on relatively little feed. They usually need lower energy intake but still require balanced nutrients. In these cases, a balancer and controlled forage may be more suitable than calorie-heavy feed.

The main point is to match feed to the horse's current state rather than its type or reputation. Condition scoring, workload, and forage quality are more important than guesswork.

## How to build a simple horse feed mix recipe

A practical **horse feed mix recipe** does not need to be complex. Start with forage, then add ingredients that serve a clear purpose. A simple mix might include **beet pulp** for digestible fibre, **oils** for extra calories, and a **supplement** if the rest of the ration is short on vitamins or minerals.

Beet pulp is useful because it adds fibre and can support safe calorie intake without relying heavily on starch. Oils can increase energy density without adding a large volume of feed, which is helpful for horses that need condition without a big bucket feed. A supplement may be needed if the forage and basic mix do not deliver the full nutrient balance.

The ideal straightforward recipe is one that the horse eats happily, breaks down easily, and can keep up reliably. You are working toward good taste, intestinal health, and steady energy rather than a long list of components. Make changes gradually and watch how the horse responds throughout the period.

## Popular brands and horse feed companies to compare

When comparing **horse feed companies**, pay attention to product **specification** rather than marketing language. Different manufacturers may offer similar feeding goals but with different ingredient profiles, feed rates, and nutrient concentrations. A strong **brand range** provides options for different conditions and workloads.

For example, **spillers horse feed** is one of several brands that many owners evaluate when looking for structured feeding options. What matters is whether a product in the range matches the horse's forage-led ration, provides the right energy level, and offers the right nutrient profile. A brand may offer balancers, complete feeds, and concentrates, but the best choice depends on what your horse truly requires.

Always compare:

- Which type of horse the feed is designed for.
- The likely daily **feed rate**.
- Whether it is high in fibre or high in starch.
- How well it fits the horse's current forage and workload.

A broad brand range is helpful, but the best decision comes from matching specification to the horse, not choosing by name alone.

## Common feeding mistakes on forage-based diets

One of the biggest errors is **overfeeding concentrates**. Concentrates can be useful, but too much can upset the balance of a forage-led ration and create unnecessary calorie overload. Another common issue is failing to adjust feed when forage quality changes. If hay becomes poorer or haylage varies, the ration may no longer meet the horse's needs.

Sudden changes are another problem. **Sudden diet changes** can disrupt gut function and should always be avoided. Horses need gradual transitions so the digestive system can adapt safely. This is especially important when changing forage, adding a new balancer, or increasing a concentrate feed.

Incorrect feeding practices can result in serious health issues. Too much starch or imbalanced rations may increase the risk of **laminitis** in susceptible horses. Oversized or poorly managed meals can also trigger **colic**. A well-planned feeding routine, regular forage supply, and thoughtful use of horse feed lower those risks.

## Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

The **what should i feed my horse quiz** below is a basic decision guide rather than a formal test. Use it to identify the right approach based on **work level**, **forage quality**, and **nutritional needs**.

- **Is the horse in low work and keeping condition well?** When yes, roughage and a balancer may be enough.
- **Is the forage good quality and the horse's body condition stable?** When yes, extra feed may be minimal.
- **Is the horse losing weight or lacking topline?** If so, you may need more calories or a improved ration.
- **Is the horse doing harder work?** If yes, consider a feed with greater calorie support.
- **Is the horse an easy keeper?** If yes, avoid unnecessary concentrates and focus on nutrient balance.

If your answers lead in different directions, start with forage analysis if possible, then use a balancer or complete feed before moving to richer options. That is the most sensible way to match the ration to real need.

## How to feed a horse in games vs real life

Searches like **how to feed a horse minecraft** often mix with real feeding questions, but **game mechanics** are not the same as **real horse nutrition**. In games, feeding is usually simplified into a basic action or item interaction. In real life, feeding is about gut health, energy balance, and long-term welfare.

That difference matters because **feeding myths** can spread easily. For example, some people assume that more feed always means more energy, or that all horses need cereal-based rations. In reality, many horses do better on a forage-first approach with only light supplementation. A horse's daily ration should be based on the quality of forage, body condition, and workload, not on what seems to work in a game.

Real horse nutrition is also more nuanced because horses need regular fibre intake, careful management of starch, and practical attention to appetite and digestion. What looks easy in a game becomes a structured feeding plan in the stable.

## **FAQs about horse feed for forage-based diets**

### **What horse feed should I use on a forage-based diet?**

Start with forage as the main part of the ration, then decide whether the horse needs a balancer, a complete horse feed, or a concentrate. The best choice depends on body condition, workload, and forage quality. For many horses, a balancer is enough if the forage is good and calories are not lacking.

### **How much horse feed does a horse need with good forage?**

It depends on bodyweight, condition, and work. If the horse is maintaining weight well on good forage, it may need just a modest amount extra horse feed, sometimes only a balancer. A horse feed calculator uk or a horse feeding chart can help estimate a rough guide, but you should revise in line with condition scoring and actual forage intake.

### **Is a complete horse feed better than a balancer?**

Not always. A complete horse feed can be useful if you want a single product that includes vitamins and minerals, fibre, and low starch energy. A balancer is often better for easy keepers or horses that already get enough calories from forage, because it keeps nutrients balanced without adding much energy.

### **How do I use a horse feed calculator UK to set a ration?**

Enter the horse's bodyweight, workload, and any known forage details to estimate daily ration needs. Use the result as a guide, then check the horse's body condition score and forage intake. The calculator helps you decide whether to stop at forage plus balancer or move to a more substantial feed, but it should not be used instead of observation.

### **What are the main horse feeding rules for forage-based diets?**

The main horse feeding rules are to keep forage as the base, use ad-lib forage where suitable, feed small meals, avoid sudden diet changes, and match the ration to workload and condition. Good feeding also means monitoring for signs of colic or laminitis risk, keeping the ration consistent, and adjusting it when the horse's needs change.