

What horse feed is and why feeding principles matter

Horse feed is any part of a horse's diet that helps meet its **nutritional requirements**, from **forage** such as **hay** and **pasture** to **concentrates**, balancers, and other prepared feeds. Proper feeding is not just about loading a bucket. It is about promoting the **digestive system**, maintaining **gut health**, and providing steady energy levels without overwhelming the horse with too much starch or sugar.

That is why **horse feeding rules** matter. Horses are built to graze for long periods, so feeding plans need to work with their anatomy rather than against it. A well-planned routine helps protect **digestive health**, <http://www.harrisburgnewsnow.com/news/story/560527/with-half-of-britains-horses-overweight-bifid-launches-grainfree-lowsugar-feed-for-the-nations-gooddoers.html> supports a stable **condition score**, and reduces the risk of issues such as **colic** and **laminitis**.

If you are looking for **horse feed advice uk** style guidance, the core principle is simple: base the diet on forage, then add only what is needed for workload, life stage, and body condition. For **horse feed for beginners**, this can feel confusing at first because shelves are full of mixes, cubes, chaffs, and complete feeds. The best starting point is to understand what the horse actually needs before selecting the product.

Rule 1: Feed following forage-first principles

The foundation of any balanced ration should be **forage-first**. Practically speaking, that means prioritising **forage**, **hay**, and **pasture** before all else. These fibre sources help keep the gut moving, support chewing time, and promote better **digestive health**.

In most cases, forage should make up the majority of the diet. The reason is simple: fibre is the horse's natural fuel. It supports the hindgut, helps maintain a healthy **digestive system**, and [overweight horse feed](#) provides slow-release energy rather than quick spikes. Horses that receive too little roughage may become stressed, develop poor manure quality, or show signs of discomfort.

A forage-first approach also makes feed selection easier. Once good-quality hay or pasture is in place, the rest of the horse feed plan can focus on gaps: extra calories for hard work, vitamins and minerals for balance, or a carefully managed **concentrate feed** for horses that need it.

Principle 2: Match horse feed to workload, age, and condition

Not every horse needs the same **types of horse feed**. A horse in light hacking, a competition horse in regular training, a growing youngster, and an older horse each have different needs. The best approach is to match feed to **workload**, **life stage**, and **body condition score**.

A horse with a low body condition score may need more calories and better energy density. A horse that is overweight may need more fibre and fewer calories. Workload changes **energy levels** and therefore the amount and type of feed required. Life stage matters too: young horses need support for growth, while seniors may need feeds that are easier to chew and digest.

Perform condition score checks regularly rather than guessing. Run your hands over the ribs, neck, shoulder, and hindquarters. Combine this with observations of behaviour, topline, and performance. This makes it easier to decide whether to increase fibre, adjust concentrate levels, or switch to a different formulation.

Rule 3: Follow a horse feeding chart to help guide daily amounts

A **horse feeding chart** is a practical planning aid for working out a **daily ration**. It makes it easier to translate **bodyweight**, activity level, and feed type into clear **feed rates**. While every horse is individual, a chart prevents underfeeding and overfeeding by providing a consistent framework.

Many owners consult a chart together with a weighing tape or scale to estimate **bodyweight**. After that, you can create the ration around forage and then adjust the bucket feed according to workload and condition. A good chart should be read alongside the feed label rather than used alone, because different feeds have different calorie densities and nutrient profiles.

If you use a **horse feed calculator uk** tool, the goal is usually the same: work out daily intake and compare it against the horse's requirements. This helps with ration planning, especially if you are balancing hay, pasture, balancer, and bucket feed. It also improves better budgeting because you can see how much feed the horse is likely to need each month.

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Rule 4: Bring in any new horse feed gradually

Any **feed transition** should be done carefully. Changing diet too quickly can disrupt the **gut microbiome** and lead to **digestive upset**. Horses rely on a delicate balance of microbes in the hindgut, so abrupt changes can have immediate effects on appetite, manure, and comfort.

When introducing a new horse feed, blend it into the current diet over several days or longer, depending on the change. This applies to new mixes, cubes, balancers, and even changes in forage. Slow change gives the digestive system time to adapt and lowers the risk of **colic**.

Watch for signs such as loose droppings, reduced appetite, bloating, or discomfort. If those appear, reduce the transition further and reassess the ration. Good feeding management is about consistency, patience, and close observation rather than rapid changes in brand or formulation.

Rule 5: Select the most suitable type of horse feed

Understanding **types of horse feed** makes product selection much easier. The main options include **complete horse feed**, **mix**, **cube**, and **chaff**. Each has different uses depending on the horse's needs and the rest of the ration.

A **complete horse feed** is designed to deliver a broad range of nutrients in one product, often suitable when forage is limited or when convenience is important. A **mix** can be tastier for some horses and may be used to bring variety or energy. A **cube** is often easier to measure, may reduce sorting, and can be practical for horses that eat too quickly. **Chaff** can help slow eating, encourage chewing, and increase fibre intake in the bucket.

The best choice depends on the horse's workload, body condition, and the quality of forage available. Palatability matters too: if the horse will not eat it, the best formulation is not useful. Compare the feed's intended use, digestibility, and whether it is designed as a low-calorie fibre option or a higher-energy concentrate feed.

Rule 6: Don't give too much of feed concentrates or starch

One of the most vital horse feeding rules is to regulate **starch** and **sugar** intake. High levels of **concentrates** can overload the digestive system, raise the risk of digestive disturbance, and lead to problems such as **laminitis**.

Starch content and sugar levels should be reviewed carefully on the label. Horses that are prone to tying up, nervousness, or weight gain often do well on low-starch, higher-fiber diets. For most horses, especially those not in intense work, the diet can be built mainly from forage plus a balancer rather than a large bucket of concentrate feed.

If a horse needs extra calories, adding more starch is not necessarily the best solution. Think about more fibre, more oil, or a different feed structure as an alternative. The aim is to keep energy available without creating large swings in the hindgut environment. That method supports steadier performance and better digestive comfort.

Rule 7: Keep water, salt, and fibre available

Drinking water, **mineral salt**, and **fibre** are vital elements of the ration, not optional extras. Continuous access to clean water aids **water balance** and digestion. Salt helps to replace lost electrolytes and prompts drinking. Fibre keeps the gut moving and supports normal bowel function.

Numerous feeding concerns are not really about feed at all. A horse with inadequate water intake may eat less, be more susceptible to impaction, or show changes in manure. Adequate hydration is especially important when forage is dry, during intense work, or when the horse is taking in more concentrates.

Adding a little quantity of salt to the ration, if appropriate, can support intake. However, clean water should always be accessible first. Fiber should remain at the core, because it supports chewing, saliva production, and healthy digestion much better than a high-starch bucket feed on its own.

Rule 8: Serve little meals at regular times

A well-planned **feeding schedule** supports the horse's usual routine. Horses usually thrive when meals are fed at regular times and in smaller portions rather than large meals given rarely. This helps support the **hindgut** and encourages smoother **digestion**.

Large meals can overwhelm the digestive tract, especially if they are starch-heavy. Smaller portions are simpler to digest and help maintain consistent energy. They also reduce competition at feed time and can improve behaviour in some horses.

Routine matters. Horses are animals of habit, and consistent **meal frequency** often helps reduce stress. If the horse is in training, feeding should be timed with exercise so that the gut is not overloaded before work. The goal is always unchanged: stability, tranquility, and better digestive efficiency.

Rule 9: Check labels and compare horse feed companies

Not every **horse feed companies** formulate products in the same way, so label reading is crucial. A clear **nutrition label** tells you what is actually in the bucket, while the **ingredients** list and **analytical constituents** help you compare products properly.

When you compare feeds, look at protein, oil, fibre, starch content, sugar content, vitamins, and **trace minerals**. These figures reveal whether the feed is designed as a balancer, a high-fibre product, a conditioning feed, or a performance option. The ingredients list may also show the main fibre sources and grain sources, which influences the overall nutritional profile.

Brands such as **spillers horse feed** are often preferred because they offer a broad range of formulations for different needs. That said, brand name alone should never replace label analysis. The best product is the one that fits your horse's workload, condition score, and feeding plan.

Look for practical details as well: recommended feeding rate, intended use, suitability for low-starch feeding, and whether the feed is designed to be used with a balancer or alongside forage. These details are often more useful than marketing claims.

Rule 10: Assess horse feed price and modify the ration

Horse feed cost is important because the ideal ration must be practical. If a diet is too expensive to keep up, it usually becomes irregular. That is why it helps to ask, **how much does horse feed cost** per month and whether the current ration gives real value.

A **horse feed calculator uk** can help estimate monthly use and pinpoint where costs sit in the ration. When reviewing **budget**, consider the whole diet, not just the bag price. A cheaper feed that requires large amounts may end up costing more than a more concentrated product fed in smaller quantities. Likewise, a complete feed may appear costly but can replace several separate products.

Reassess the ration by checking whether the horse is getting more than it needs, especially if workload changes or turnout increases. If the horse is maintaining condition on forage and a balancer, there may be no need for additional bucket feed. Routine checking keeps the ration practical, efficient, and aligned with the horse's current needs.

Common horse feeding mistakes to watch out for

Some of the most common mistakes are also the most easy to stop. **Overfeeding** can result in excess weight, poor performance, and increased risk of metabolic issues. **Underfeeding** can cause weight loss, poor topline, dull coat condition, and reduced stamina.

A **sudden diet change** is another major problem because it can disrupt the gut microbiome and raise the risk of **colic**. Always transition gradually. Another serious error is feeding **mouldy feed**. Mould can affect appetite, respiratory health, and digestive comfort, so any spoiled feed should be thrown out immediately.

Other mistakes include neglecting forage quality, using concentrates without measuring them properly, and feeding based on guesswork rather than observation. The horse's body condition score, workload, and behaviour should guide changes, not habit alone.

Basic horse feed mix recipe and when to use one

A basic **horse feed mix recipe** can be practical when you want better control over what goes in and feeding rate. A good example might combine a suitable **balancer**, a measured amount of **oats** if extra energy is needed, and some **supplements** only where there is a clear reason to use them.

This kind of mix is most useful for horses with specific needs that are not fully met by one ready-made product. As an example, a horse in moderate work may need more energy than a balancer provides, but not the full level of a higher-calorie complete feed. Under those circumstances, a measured mix can help balance cost, palatability, and nutrient intake.

That said, homemade mixes should be planned carefully. They are easiest to get wrong if the horse's forage intake, bodyweight, and condition score are not understood. Supplements should not be added casually, because

the base ration may already provide enough vitamins and minerals. The aim is a balanced ration, not a bucket full of extras.

Horse feed for beginners: a simple starter checklist

For **horse feed for beginners**, the starting point is a short checklist rather than a complicated spreadsheet. First, estimate **bodyweight**. Next, confirm how much **forage** the horse receives from **hay** and **pasture**. Then assess **workload**, body condition score, and whether a bucket feed is needed at all.

- Measure bodyweight with a tape or scale.
- Leave forage the main part of the diet.
- Decide whether the horse needs a balancer, complete horse feed, or no concentrate feed.
- Portion every feed portion.
- Offer constant water and salt.
- Change any new feed gradually.
- Track droppings, coat, energy, and condition score.

A feed bucket is only one part of management. The simpler the feeding plan, the easier it is to stay consistent. Beginners often do best by keeping the ration modest and reviewing it regularly as work, turnout, and body condition change.

FAQ: quick answers on horse feed and feeding rules

What are the 10 rules of feeding horses?

The 10 rules are: give forage first, tailor feed to workload and life stage, use a feeding chart for horses, make changes gradually, pick the right feed type, avoid overfeeding concentrates and starch, keep water, salt, and fibre available, offer small meals consistently, read labels carefully, and revisit horse feed cost regularly.

What should I feed my horse if I am a beginner?

If you're a novice, start with forage as the core diet, then add only what the horse needs based on body mass, body condition score, and workload. Many horses do well on good forage plus a balancer or a basic complete horse feed, but not every horse needs a bucket feed. Keep changes gradual and request horse feed advice uk style guidance if you are unsure.

How do I use a horse feeding chart correctly?

Consult the horse feeding chart to estimate daily intake based on bodyweight, workload, and feed type. Consider it as a guide rather than a fixed rule, then adjust for the horse's condition score, pasture access, and forage quality. Always compare the chart with the product label and your horse's response over time.

What is the monthly cost of horse feed?

Horse feed cost varies depending on the type of feed, daily amount, and whether the horse also has good forage and pasture. The best way to estimate monthly cost is to use a horse feed calculator uk tool or calculate the daily ration from the label, then multiply it by the number of days in the month. It gives a more accurate answer than looking only at bag price.

Is complete horse feed suitable for every horse?

No, complete horse feed is not automatically appropriate for every horse. It can be very beneficial for some horses, especially where convenience or fibre-based feeding is needed, but others may perform better on forage plus a balancer or a different concentrate feed. Always review the starch content, sugar content, and feeding rate, and make sure it suits the horse's workload and digestive health needs.