



New Mexico Horse Council
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Feeding Your Horse



Pasture: The major component of a horse's diet is good forage, such as hay or pasture. A horse weighing 1000 lbs. will eat about 600 lbs. of forage each month. How much land will you need to feed one horse for a year?

Keeping a horse on dry land (non-irrigated) pasture, use the following formula to determine how many acres your horse will need per year:

1 animal unit (1 horse) per inch of annual rain (for the region) per section of land (640 ac.) example: 640 acres divided by 8 inches of rain = 80 acres per 1 horse.

To keep pasture grass healthy, DO NOT let the horse overgraze the land so that the grass will no longer grow. Overgrazed dryland pasture may never recover.

Irrigated pastures with adequate moisture will grow more forage than dryland pasture so less acreage is needed. The amount of land needed for one horse ranges from 3/4 to 1 1/4 acres. The horse will not eat grass that has been trampled or has manure on it. Overgrazing will also damage irrigated pastures. For good quality regrowth, leave about 1/3 of the grass uneaten. Mangle your pasture as a crop by testing soil, fertilizing, clipping weeds and managing manure.

CAUTION:

Before turning a horse out to pasture for the first time you must condition it to a change in diet. Turning the horse out on a green lush pasture is DANGEROUS and can result in sickness or death. Start out slowly by letting the horse graze for a few minutes each day and gradually increase to a few hours each day.

Read more about maintaining a healthy pasture at TheHorse.com.

Hay: Your horse will need supplemental hay during periods of snow cover or other times when pasture forage is not available. Feeding hay will also extend the grazing season on properties with small acreage.

A small rectangular bale of hay can weigh between 45 and 85 lbs. How much hay to buy and feed to your horse should be based upon the weight of the bales and the nutrient value of the hay.

You can feed less hay if it is higher quality. It is best to have your hay analyzed to determine nutrient value. An average 1000-lb. horse will eat 20 lbs. of medium quality hay per day.

Legume (alfalfa and clover) hay is higher in protein than grass hay, so you need to feed less (weight) legume hay than grass hay. Grass hay will keep the horse busy eating longer and prevent boredom.

In New Mexico, alfalfa is cut up to six times per year. Later cuttings may have higher protein

content. Do not switch diets abruptly between grass and alfalfa. Hays in your region will vary in type and cost. Consult your veterinarian as to What is best for your horse.

Hay for horses must be mold and dust free.

Weeds have limited nutritional value. Weed seeds can be passed through the manure and infest your pasture. Buy hay that is free of Weeds; as some weeds are poisonous to horses. How do you determine how much hay to buy? Use this formula and fill in the blanks with your own numbers:

____ Number of days to feed hay x 20 lbs. hay per day divided by ____ lbs. of weight per bale = number of bales needed.

Example: 365 days x 20 lbs. hay per day divided by 50 lbs. per bale = 146 bales needed for one year for one horse.

Grain: A grain mix (usually oats and corn) should be added to the diet when you increase the horse's training, work or activity. Young and old horses may also need grain.

This chart shows how much grain to feed an average 1000-lb. horse:

No Work, No Grain

Light Work (1-2 hours per day) 1-1 1/2 lbs. grain per hour of work

Medium Work (2-4 hours per day) 1 1/2-2 lbs. grain per hour of work

Heavy Work (4 or more hours per day) 1 1/2-2 1/2 lbs. grain per hour of work

Water: Your horse must have plenty of clean, fresh water available at ALL times. A horse will drink 10 to 12 gallons of water each day, depending on temperature, humidity levels, ration content, work load. In the winter months, stock tank heaters will help stop ice buildup so that water is always accessible to the horse.