

What shifts in winter feeding for horses?

winter feeding differs because horses use increased **energy requirements** to stay warm, especially in **freezing weather**. A well-planned **winter feeding** approach is not only about increasing more **horse feed**; it is about balancing the whole **winter diet** so it helps maintain body temperature, condition and **digestive health**.

The largest change is usually the need for more **roughage**. Horses are built for a **forage-focused diet**, and in winter that means more **hay** or **wrapped forage** to increase **fibre intake** and help maintain gut function. This matters because fibre fermentation in the hindgut produces heat and helps **stabilise weight** without relying too heavily on cereal-based feeds.

Many horses also have different **exercise load** levels in winter. Some move less, some work more intensely, and some become **idle horses** with a lower **maintenance diet** need. That means the same feeding routine will not suit every horse. A careful **feeding plan** should consider body condition, exercise, pasture availability and the quality of forage.

Another key factor is that winter feed must balance warmth and condition without pushing too much **starch content**. Excess starch can upset the gut, so many owners increase digestible fibre and use **supplementary feed** only where needed. The aim is **feed balance**: enough fuel, enough fibre, and enough nutrients to keep the horse healthy.

Types of horse feed for cold weather

There are several **types of horse feed** that can help in winter, and the best choice depends on whether the horse needs calories, extra nutrients, or simply a more balanced diet. The main options include feeding with forage first, **complete horse feed**, cereal-based **compound feed**, and fibre-led **concentrates**.

A **complete horse feed** is created to provide both roughage-like fibre and balanced nutrients in one product. It can be a good fit for horses that need convenience or where forage quality is inconsistent. Because it is designed as a full ration or part-ration depending on the brand, it often supports reliable **feed formulation** and can be helpful for the horse owner who wants a easier approach.

A **compound feed** is a mixed feed containing ingredients such as cereals, fibres, oils, vitamins and minerals. These feeds often sit between straight cereals and complete feeds, and they can be beneficial for horses that need added calories or a specific nutrient profile. Some are designed for performance, others for condition, and some for lower-energy winter maintenance.

Concentrates are feeds given in smaller amounts to add energy or nutrients to a forage-based diet. They may be based on fibre, oil, or cereals. The best concentrates are those that complement the horse's forage and support **gut health** rather than overwhelming it.

When choosing among these **types of horse feed**, consider in terms of what the horse actually needs:

- Extra fibre and warmth: prioritise hay or haylage and fibre-based feeds.
- More calories for work: consider a performance-oriented complete feed or compound feed.
- Extra nutrients without lots of extra calories: use a balancer or low-intake concentrate.

For many horses, the best winter strategy is not a dramatic change but a careful adjustment in digestible energy, palatability and fibre intake.

How to choose the best horse feed

When you are looking for **horse feed for beginners**, the clearest rule is this: start with forage, then provide only what is needed to support condition and work. Good **horse feed advice uk** usually begins with the horse's **body condition score**, its **workload**, and the quality of the forage available.

A horse in healthy body condition that is doing light work may only need excellent hay, a balancer, and possibly a small amount of **concentrates**. A lean horse that is working harder may need more calories from a well-chosen compound feed or complete horse feed. An overweight horse may need a tightly controlled winter ration with careful attention to fibre and restricted calorie-dense extras.

Using body condition is more reliable than guessing by eye alone. A **condition score** helps you decide whether the horse needs to gain, lose or maintain weight. You can also track whether the horse feels ribby, flat over the top line or carrying excess fat. This makes the decision about feed formulation much more objective.

It also helps to think about the horse as one of three practical categories:

- **Idle horse:** usually needs maintenance calories, plenty of forage and limited concentrate.
- **Performance horse:** needs more digestible energy and careful feed balance to support work.
- **Horse needing to stabilise weight:** often benefits from improved forage quality, a balancer and controlled supplementary feed.

As a beginner, you do not need to chase every feed trend. Instead, match the feed to the horse's current needs, inspect the label, and reassess condition every couple of weeks. If the horse is losing weight, increasing fibre and digestible energy may help. If it is gaining too much, reduce calorie-dense concentrates and focus on forage quality.

Rules for horse feeding to observe in winter

Proper **horse feeding rules** make winter feeding safer and more effective. The well-known **10 rules of feeding horses** are often presented differently by different professionals, but the core principles stay the same: feed small amounts regularly, keep forage available, steer clear of sudden changes, balance the ration, and protect **digestive health**.

To begin with, never rely on one large feed to do all the work. Horses are trickle feeders by nature, so **feeding frequency** matters. Smaller meals reduce digestive strain and help maintain more stable energy levels. Second, keep forage as the base of the diet. A good winter ration should still be forage-led even when extra feed is needed.

Another point, keep **starch** under control. High-starch feeds can be useful for some horses, but they are not the best default choice in winter. Excess starch may contribute to gut upset, especially if the horse is already on restricted turnout or has a sensitive digestive system. Fibre and oil are often better long-term energy sources.

Fourth, protect the gut by changing feeds gradually. Sudden increases in horse feed, or sudden switches between products, can upset the hindgut and compromise **gut health**. Finally, make sure the ration includes the nutrients the horse cannot get from forage alone, such as vitamins, minerals and sometimes **electrolytes** if the horse is still sweating in work.

Some practical winter feeding rules to keep in mind:

- Base the diet on hay or haylage wherever possible.
- Introduce new feeds slowly over 7 to 14 days.

- Do not let the horse go for long periods without forage.
- Set concentrates to workload, not habit.
- Review the feed label for fibre, starch, energy and added nutrients.
- Offer fresh water at all times, especially when feeding dry hay.
- Give electrolytes when sweat losses justify them, not as a routine add-on.

Observing these rules helps keep the winter ration safer, workable and well-managed.

How much horse feed should you give?

There is no single answer to daily amounts, which is why a **horse feeding chart** is best used as a starting point rather than a fixed prescription. A practical **horse feed calculator uk** approach looks at body weight, the quality of forage, workload, weather exposure and body condition. The first question is not “how much concentrate should I feed?” but “how much forage intake does this horse need first?”

As a basic feeding guide, aim to prioritise forage and then add concentrated feed only if needed. For many horses, forage should make up most of the ration. If hay or haylage quality is lower, the horse may need more feed support. If forage quality is good and the horse is only in light work, feed quantities can stay low.

A simple chart-style explanation can help:

- **Good-doer, low workload:** forage-focused diet, maybe just a balancer, minimal concentrates.
- **Average body condition, light to moderate work:** forage plus small amounts of complete horse feed.
- **Thin horse or harder-working horse:** higher-quality forage, extra digestible energy, and a measured increase in concentrates.
- **Horse needing weight support:** increase forage intake first, then use energy-dense feed only as required.

When using a **horse feeding chart**, remember that feed quantities must reflect the entire ration, not just the bucket feed. Hay and haylage are part of the overall intake. A horse on restricted grazing may need more hay to keep fibre intake high. A horse with good turnout may need less bucket feed but still needs an appropriate winter ration.

For accuracy, a **horse feed calculator uk** can help you estimate calories and ration size, but the result should still be checked against the horse’s condition and performance. The most useful guide is whether the **Learn here** horse is holding weight, behaving normally, and showing normal droppings and appetite.

Horse feed pricing: what you should budget for

Horse feed cost varies widely depending on feed type, quality, how much you use and whether you buy a basic balancer, a fibre feed or a premium complete ration. If you are asking **how much does horse feed cost**, the honest answer is that there is no fixed figure, but winter budgeting becomes much easier when you separate forage costs from bucket feed costs.

The winter months is often the season when feed bills rise because more hay or haylage is needed, and some horses also need more supplementary feed. You should therefore include in your budget:

- Costs for forage such as hay or haylage
- Feed concentrates or complete horse feed
- Nutritional balancers and vitamin-mineral support

- Mineral salts if the workload requires them
- Transport or storage considerations

Different **horse feed companies** design their products differently, so a feed that looks expensive per bag may actually be economical if the feeding rate is low. On the other hand, a cheaper feed may need to be fed in larger amounts to meet the same nutritional target. This is where comparing the cost per day, not just cost per bag, is useful.

Good **winter budgeting** means choosing feed according to need rather than branding alone. Some horses do best on a simple forage-plus-balancer approach, which can reduce total spend. Others genuinely need a more substantial product. The key is not to overspend on unnecessary calories while still protecting condition and digestive health.

Well-known producers along with feeds to compare

When assessing feeds from different **horse feed companies**, move past marketing claims and focus on **nutrients** and the **feed label**. A product such as **spillers horse feed** may be a good fit to one horse and not needed for another, depending on fibre content, starch level, oil, vitamin and mineral profile, and feeding rate.

Helpful points to compare include:

- Available energy per kilogram
- Fibre content and source
- Starch level
- Included vitamins and minerals
- Addition of **electrolytes** if relevant
- Whether the product is a complete horse feed, balancer or concentrate

The feed label should tell you whether the ration suits a maintenance diet, a horse in work, or a horse needing extra condition. Pay attention to whether the product is intended to be fed alone or alongside forage. Some owners assume a complete feed removes the need for other planning, but even a complete horse feed still needs to fit the overall winter ration and forage intake.

It is also worth comparing palatability. A feed can be nutritionally sound, but if the horse refuses it, it is not practical. Good palatability supports consistent intake, which is important for horses that need to steady weight or restore condition.

Can you create your own horse feed mix?

Yes, it is possible to create a **horse feed mix recipe**, but it should be done carefully. A homemade mix may help if you understand forage quality, mineral balance and energy needs. The most common ingredients people consider are **oats**, **barley** and a **balancer**, but the mix must still support feed balance and not create too much starch.

Oats are often chosen because they are palatable and easy to digest. Barley provides more dense energy but usually needs careful processing to be suitable. However, cereal-based mixes can raise starch levels quickly, so they are not the best starting point for every horse. A balancer helps fill nutritional gaps by providing vitamins, minerals and amino acids without adding lots of bulk or calories.

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If you plan to make a home mix, a sensible approach is:

- Begin with the forage ration first.
- Work out whether the horse needs extra calories, protein or micronutrients.
- Use a balancer before increasing cereal volume.
- Use oats or barley only if the horse genuinely needs more digestible energy.
- Monitor condition and behaviour on a regular basis.

A home mix can be effective for experienced owners, but it is easy to underfeed key nutrients or overdo starch. If you are unsure, a commercial product may provide better feed formulation and a more consistent winter ration.

Quick quiz and FAQs for winter feeding decisions

Try this simple **what should i feed my horse quiz** to narrow down your winter feeding choice. Think through each question and match the horse's needs to the answer rather than choosing a feed first and hoping it fits.

- Is the horse maintaining **body condition**?
- Is the horse in light work, moderate work or harder work?
- Is forage quality good, average or poor?
- Does the horse need more energy, more nutrients, or both?
- Is the horse an **idle horse**, a performance horse, or one that needs to stabilise weight?
- Is the budget better suited to hay plus a balancer, or a more complete feed solution?

That is the practical core of **horse feed advice uk**: choose the feed for the horse, the season and the budget. In winter feeding, the best results usually come from a forage-led plan, sensible use of concentrates, and regular reassessment of condition. This approach works for most **horses** without becoming overly complicated.

What is the best horse feed for winter feeding?

The most suitable **horse feed** for winter feeding is usually built around forage, with hay or haylage as the base and a appropriate balancer or concentrate added only if the horse needs additional energy or nutrients. The most appropriate choice depends on workload, body condition and forage quality. For many horses, a high-fibre or complete horse feed works well because it supports digestive health and helps stabilise weight without excessive starch.

How much horse feed should a horse get in winter?

How much a horse should get in winter depends on forage intake, body condition, workload and how much extra energy the horse uses to stay warm. Start with enough forage to support gut health, then add feed quantities slowly if the horse needs more condition or performance support. A horse feed calculator uk can help estimate amounts, but the horse's body condition score should always direct the final ration.

Is complete horse feed enough on its own?

A complete horse feed can be enough on its own in some situations, because it is created to provide a balanced ration. However, it still needs to be checked against the horse's age, workload, body condition and forage availability. Some horses do well on complete feed plus forage alone, while others need extra supplementary feed, a balancer, or adjusted forage intake. Always read the feed label carefully.

How do I calculate horse feed amounts in the UK?

To calculate horse feed amounts in the UK, begin with the horse's weight, condition score and workload, then estimate the amount of forage needed before adding any concentrate. A horse feed calculator uk can help you work out digestible energy needs and daily feed quantities, but it should be used together with practical observation. If the horse is losing weight, gaining too much, or showing changes in gut health, the ration needs modifying.

What are the main horse feeding rules to follow in winter?

The main **horse feeding rules** in winter are to keep forage at the centre of the ration, feed little and often, introduce changes slowly, avoid unnecessary starch, and monitor digestive health. The classic 10 rules of feeding horses also stress clean water, appropriate feeding frequency, and careful use of concentrates. Good winter feeding is about regularity, not sudden changes or overfeeding.

Frequent horse feeding mistakes to avoid

A major one of the most common mistakes is **overfeeding**. Many people often add additional bucket feed when the horse really needs [overweight horse feed](#) better forage, a balancer or a more suitable feed formulation. Excess feeding can lead to wasted money, excess weight and a less stable digestive system. Another major error is allowing **restricted forage** for too long. Horses need near-continuous fibre intake to support gut health and maintain a healthy winter ration.

Sudden diet changes are also risky. Moving from one feed to another too quickly can upset the hindgut and trigger poor appetite, loose droppings or even colic. Always change horse feed gradually and keep an eye on behaviour and body condition as you do it.

Colic is a serious concern whenever forage is reduced too much, meal size becomes too large, or feed balance is poor. Avoiding large starch-heavy meals and keeping forage available are two of the best ways to reduce the risk. It is also important not to ignore the need for electrolytes when a horse is still working and sweating, even in colder months.

A good winter feeding strategy is simple: use forage as the base, choose the right type of horse feed for the horse's workload and condition, and review regularly. A careful, practical approach supports digestive health, keeps the horse comfortable in winter, and helps you budget more effectively.