

The ideal **horse feed** to serve alongside **hay** depends on which nutrients the horse is missing from forage, how much work it does, and whether its body condition is consistent. In most cases, good hay plus a **ration balancer** or a modest amount of **concentrates** is enough. Horses that need more **energy** may do better with a higher-nutrient **complete horse feed**, while easy keepers often need little more than forage and targeted **vitamins and minerals**.

The simple answer is this: provide the minimum amount of horse feed needed to meet the horse's **energy requirements** and nutrient needs without upsetting **digestive health**. That means starting with hay, then choosing a feed that complements the **forage** rather than replacing it. A **forage-first** approach encourages the **digestive system**, improves **gut health**, and helps you manage **condition** more effectively than relying on large meals of dense feed.

What does a horse need if hay is the main forage?

When **hay** is the main **forage**, the horse's diet should still meet several core needs: enough **fibre** to keep the digestive system working properly, adequate calories to match workload, and enough micronutrients to cover gaps in the forage. Good hay can supply a lot of the daily diet, but hay quality varies in **digestibility**, **overweight horse feed** protein, and mineral content. This is why two horses eating the same hay may still need different horse feed plans.

The first question is whether the horse has enough **energy** from hay alone. A horse in light work may maintain well on forage plus a low-calorie balancer, while a horse in harder **workload** may need additional calories to maintain weight and performance. The second question is nutrient balance. Even excellent hay may not provide enough **protein**, copper, zinc, selenium, or other **micronutrients**. At this point a targeted feed can help create a more complete **balanced diet**.

For horses, forage is not just filler. It is the foundation of **digestive health**. Fibre supports chewing, saliva production, and a stable gut environment. A well-built feeding plan aims to maintain a steady **ration** of forage across the day, then use horse feed only to top up what hay cannot provide. That is the basis of most sensible feeding plans for leisure horses, working horses, and horses needing **weight management**.

Types of horse feed for use alongside hay

There are many **kinds of horse feed** on offer, but not every one are ideal with hay in the same way. Broadly, horse feed can be grouped into a few practical categories: **concentrates**, **nuts**, **mashes**, balancers, and fully fortified feeds. The best choice depends on the horse's **condition**, appetite, and the **feed rate** needed to deliver calories and nutrients.

Concentrates are feeds that provide greater calories and nutrients in a smaller meal than forage. They are useful when a horse needs more **energy** or when hay alone is not enough. However, concentrates should be chosen carefully because some are high in **starch**. A lot of starch at once can challenge the digestive system and may be unsuitable for horses prone to excitability or poor gut health.

Nuts are a popular choice because they are easy to feed, often palatable, and can come in fibre-based or conditioning forms. A fibre-based nut is usually a good companion to hay because it supports a forage-led ration. Conditioning nuts may suit horses needing more calories, but the total ration still needs to be matched to body condition score and workload.

Mashes can be useful for older horses, poor drinkers, or horses that benefit from a softer meal. A mash may improve palatability and make fibre easier to eat, but it should not be chosen simply because it seems gentle. Check the actual nutrient profile, as some mashes are mainly a carrier rather than a complete feed. Used well, mashes can support hydration and meal size management.

Other common options include **ration balancer** products and low-intake balancers. These are designed to deliver vitamins and minerals with minimal calories, making them useful when hay is already supplying enough energy. In many cases, this is the smartest option for good-doers, native types, or horses in light work.

When is complete horse feed the right choice?

A **complete horse feed** can be the right choice when you need a practical all-in-one ration that supplies calories, **vitamins and minerals**, and a balanced nutrient profile in one product. It is especially helpful for owners who want a straightforward feeding system and do not want to use together several separate products. The key benefit is convenience, but the real advantage is that the feed is designed as part of a **balanced ration**.

Complete feeds can work well [Learn more](#) when hay quality is inconsistent, when a horse struggles to hold weight, or when you want a managed intake for training and performance. They are also useful for horses that need a reliable feed plan without lots of guesswork. That said, “complete” does not mean “best for every horse”. If the horse is overweight, a lower-calorie balancer may be more suitable than a calorie-rich complete feed.

To decide whether a complete horse feed is right, check how it fits with the hay. A good product should support forage, not encourage overfeeding. It should also match the horse’s workload, age, and digestive needs. Horses in heavy work may need a more concentrated nutrient density, while horses on maintenance may only need a small amount of feed with hay.

Another advantage of complete feeds is uniformity. When buying from horse feed companies, the specification should make it simple to compare nutrient levels from batch to batch. This can reduce uncertainty in your feeding plan and make it easier to maintain condition through the seasons.

How many horse feed should you feed with hay?

There’s no single answer to how much horse feed should be supplied with hay, because the right amount depends on forage intake, body size, age, work, and body condition score. A useful starting point is to estimate hay intake, then assess whether the horse maintains a healthy body condition score. If the horse is dropping weight, lacking topline, or struggling in work, more calories may be required. If the horse is gaining too easily, feed should be reduced.

A **horse feeding chart** can be a helpful tool for rough daily intake, but it should never replace observation. Charts provide a starting point for feed rate, yet the horse’s actual response matters more. This is where a **horse feed calculator uk** tool can be useful as a planning aid, but it is still only a guide. You must tweak for forage quality, energy requirements, and the horse’s measured condition.

Body condition score is one of the most reliable tools for deciding quantities. If the horse is too lean, you may need to boost calorie density through concentrates, nuts, or a complete horse feed. If the horse is too fleshy, lower the amount of horse feed and rely more heavily on hay and fibre-based options. For many horses, the best strategy is to use the lowest practical meal size that supports maintenance and performance.

As a simple guideline, start with the minimum amount needed to balance the hay, then increase only if there is a clear reason. Avoid large jumps in ration size, especially with starch-rich feeds. The goal is steady digestion and stable condition, not excessive intake.

Horse feeding rules: everyday basics to follow

Good **horse feeding rules** promote gut performance, aid energy use, and prevent avoidable digestive upsets. These rules are often summarised as the **10 rules of feeding horses**, and while different yards may phrase them differently, the core ideas are the same.

- Start with plenty of forage
- Make hay available for as many hours of the day as possible.
- Tailor horse feed to workload, age, and condition.
- Avoid overfeeding starch.
- Keep portion sizes sensible.
- Introduce changes slowly.
- Offer clean water at all times.
- Use salt and supplements appropriately.
- Check body condition regularly.
- Revisit the ration whenever workload, hay, or season changes.

2 of the most important nutrients to manage are **starch** and **fibre**. Fibre should remain the base of the ration because it supports the digestive system and helps maintain gut health. Starch can supply quick calories, but too much starch in one meal can increase the risk of digestive upset and should be kept in check, especially for horses with a sensitive digestive system.

These horse feeding rules are not complicated, but they are powerful. A consistent plan with the right feed rate is usually better than switching products often. Horses thrive on routine, stable forage intake, and a well-matched feeding plan.

Equine feed for newcomers: how to begin safely

When you are new to feeding, the best **horse feed for beginners** is usually a choice that is simple, high in fibre, and easy to add. The key aim is a **gradual change** that does not disturb the gut. Abrupt feed changes can upset the digestive system and increase the risk of **colic**, especially when moving between feed types or changing hay quality.

A practical feeding plan begins with forage, clean water, and a consistent meal time. Then introduce the new horse feed slowly over 7 to 14 days, increasing the amount little by little while reducing the old feed. This provides the digestive system time to adapt. If the horse is nervous, poor doer, or highly active, keep an eye on weight, droppings, and appetite closely during the transition.

For beginners, a ration balancer or a simple complete feed can be easier to manage than mixing several products. The smaller the number of moving parts in the feeding routine, the more straightforward it is to spot what works. Keep a note of meal size, condition, and behaviour so you can make changes based on evidence rather than guesswork.

How to assess horse feed manufacturers and labels

When assessing **horse feed companies**, do not focus only on branding. Read the **feed label**, compare the **specification**, and examine the **ingredients**. A good label should show you what the feed is designed to do, how

much to feed, and which nutrients are included. The ingredient list shows the raw materials, but the specification shows you what the horse actually receives.

Look for clear information on calories, protein, fibre, starch, oil, and mineral levels. These details matter far more than marketing language. If you are comparing products for a horse on hay, consider whether the feed provides the right nutrient density for that horse's workload and condition. A lower-starch fibre feed may suit some horses better than a calorie-dense option.

It is also useful reviewing how horse feed companies state intended use. Some feeds are aimed at leisure horses, others at performance, breeding, or weight gain. A good product should match the role the hay is already playing in the ration. Among well-known brands, some owners compare options such as **spillers horse feed** alongside other range types to see which specification best suits the horse.

The best comparison method is straightforward: align the label to the horse, not the other way around. That approach helps you choose with confidence and avoid unnecessary supplementation.

What affects horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost depends on much more than just the bag price. To understand **how much does horse feed cost**, you need to think about ration size, feed quality, and how much of the bag is actually fed each day. A higher-priced bag may be better overall value if the horse needs less of it to meet nutrient needs.

Ration size has a major effect on cost. A nutrient-dense product that meets the horse's needs in a small daily amount may be more economical than a cheap feed that must be fed in large quantities. Feed quality matters too, because better digestibility, improved palatability, and a more balanced nutrient profile can reduce waste and improve consistency.

When evaluating cost, work out the daily spend rather than the price per bag. That gives a more accurate view of affordability. For a horse on hay, a ration balancer may be one of the most economical options because it supplies vitamins and minerals with a low feed rate. In contrast, a conditioning feed may be more expensive more because it is designed to deliver more calories.

Saving money should never come at the expense of digestive health. Sometimes the cheapest safe answer is the one that maintains the ration simple and removes unnecessary extras.

Can you make a horse feed mix recipe at home?

A homemade **horse feed mix recipe** can be suitable, but only if you understand the nutritional gaps and balance the ration carefully. The classic home-mix ingredients often include **oats**, **barley**, and **beet pulp**. Each brings different qualities: oats are generally more palatable and easier to chew, barley is more energy-dense but should be handled carefully, and beet pulp adds fermentable fibre.

Home mixing can be useful when you want full control over ingredients and meal size. However, it is easy to create an unbalanced ration if the mineral and vitamin content is overlooked. That is why many owners pair a home mix with a ration balancer or targeted supplementation. Without this, the mix may fall short in vitamins and minerals even if it delivers plenty of calories.

Be especially cautious with starch-heavy ingredients. A mix based mainly on oats and barley may suit some horses in hard work, but it may not be appropriate for horses needing a low-starch diet. Beet pulp can help raise fibre and improve digestibility, making it a useful part of a more balanced home mix.

If you choose a homemade route, keep records of ingredients, amounts, and the horse's response. The best recipe is the one that keeps condition stable and supports gut health without creating excess calories.

Horse feed advice UK: common feeding mistakes to avoid

Practical **horse feed advice uk** often comes down to avoiding a few common mistakes. The biggest is **overfeeding**, especially when people confuse more feed with better nutrition. Too many calories can quickly lead to poor condition, while too much starch can upset the digestive system and increase the chance of **ulcers** or other digestive issues.

Sudden changes are yet another frequent concern. Switching hay, concentrates, or balancers too quickly can upset the gut and lead to runny manure, reduced appetite, or colic risk. Any feeding change should be step-by-step and monitored. This matters just as much for seasoned owners as it does for those looking for horse feed for beginners.

Other mistakes include feeding the wrong product for the horse's workload, ignoring body condition score, and using unnecessary supplements without checking what the base ration already provides. In many cases, the horse does not need more products; it needs a better feeding plan. A forage-led diet with the right horse feed is often better than a long list of extras.

Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

Use this quick **what should i feed my horse quiz** to narrow your choice. Start by asking three things: what is the horse's **work level**, what is its **age**, and what is its **weight**? Then compare those answers with the quality and quantity of hay available.

- If the horse is in light work, good-doing, and holding condition, hay plus a ration balancer may be enough.
- If the horse is losing weight or working harder, choose a higher-calorie feed or complete horse feed.
- If the horse is overweight, reduce calorie-dense concentrates and keep the ration fibre-led.
- If the horse is older or fussy, consider a appetizing mash or a feed with better digestibility.
- If the horse needs only nutrients, not calories, a ration balancer is often the smartest option.

This is not a substitute for professional advice, but it does make the decision clearer. Think in terms of starting with forage, then fill the gap with the smallest effective amount of horse feed.

FAQs about feeding horse feed with hay

What horse feed should be fed with hay?

The best horse feed to feed with hay is the one that fills the nutritional gap left by the forage. For many horses, that means a ration balancer or a fibre-based concentrate. If the horse needs more calories, a complete horse feed or a suitable nut may be better. The right choice depends on workload, body condition score, and hay quality.

Do horses need horse feed if they already get good-quality hay?

Not in every case. If good-quality hay supplies enough energy and the horse keeps condition, it may only need vitamins and minerals from a ration balancer. However, if the hay is low in nutrients, the horse is in work, or condition changes, extra horse feed may be needed to support a balanced diet.

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Is complete horse feed better than mix and balancer?

Not always. A complete horse feed is handy and can offer a balanced ration in one product, but a mix and balancer may be better for horses that need more control over calories, starch, or meal size. The better option depends on the horse's needs and the quality of the hay.

How much horse feed should a horse eat with hay?

It can vary by age, weight, workload, and condition. Use a horse feeding chart or a horse feed calculator uk tool as a starting point, then tweak based on body condition score and how the horse responds. The goal is to feed enough to meet energy requirements without overfeeding.

What is the cheapest safe horse feed to feed with hay?

For many horses, the cheapest safe option is a ration balancer or a plain fibre-based feed fed at a low rate. That keeps horse feed cost down while still supplying vitamins and minerals. The lowest-cost choice is not always the cheapest long term, so compare daily cost, feed quality, and ration size rather than bag price alone.