

What changes when a horse lives out?

When a horse stays outdoors, the first thing to remember is that **horse feed** decisions should start with what the horse can already get from **forage**. A horse living outside may spend most of the day feeding, picking through **pasture**, or eating hay or **haylage** if grass is short. That means the ration is often shaped more by roughage intake than by a bucket of hard feed.

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Living out changes *nutrition, hydration, and energy requirements*. In dry, wet, cold, or muddy weather, a horse may burn more calories simply staying warm and moving around. At the same time, grass quality can vary hugely through the season, so the horse's **roughage** intake may be uneven. That is why condition, weather, and **workload** matter so much.

The most useful measure is **body condition score**. It tells you whether your horse is maintaining, losing, or gaining weight. A horse living out on good grazing may need little else, while a horse on poor pasture with a higher workload may need extra feed to support condition and performance. The goal is not to add feed by habit, but to match the ration to the horse's actual needs.

For living-out horses, the usual priority is a **forage-first** approach. That means building the diet around grass, hay, or haylage, then adding a **concentrate**, balancer, or complete feed only if the forage supply does not cover all the horse's needs. This protects *gut health* and supports more natural digestion through fibre.

What are the key types of horse feed?

Several options exist for **types of horse feed**, and the right one depends on whether your horse needs additional energy, added protein, vitamins and minerals, or simply a practical base diet. The core categories are grazing feed, complete feeds, balancers, and traditional bucket feeds such as **mixes** and **cubes**.

Forage is the backbone. That includes grass from **pasture**, hay, and **haylage**. It provides **fibre**, encourages chewing time, and helps maintain a healthy digestive system. For many horses kept outdoors, forage is all they need or nearly enough.

Complete horse feed is made to provide both fibre and a more rounded nutrient profile in one product. It can be useful when forage [performance horse feed](#) quality is poor, when a horse has a higher **workload**, or when owners want a more straightforward all-in-one option. A complete feed usually has a different *digestibility* profile from a plain cereal-based bucket feed, with more emphasis on fibre and carefully managed starch.

A traditional **mix** is often a more obvious **concentrate**, typically used to add energy. A **cube** is used for a similar role, though the formulation may be different. Cubes can be more convenient to portion and may reduce selective feeding. Both may be useful for horses needing more **digestible energy**, but they are not automatically needed just because a horse is turned out.

For many horses, a **feed balancer** is a better choice than a full hard feed. It gives concentrated **vitamins and minerals** with relatively little extra energy, making it useful for horses that keep condition well on forage but still need nutritional support. This is a common answer in **horse feed advice uk** discussions, especially for good-doers and horses on adequate grass.

Do living-out horses always need hard feed?

No. A key **horse feeding rules** is that hard feed should not be given simply because a horse lives outdoors. If the horse has enough **forage** from **pasture**, hay, or haylage, and maintains an healthy **body condition score**, then a forage-based ration may be all that is required.

Many horses never need much more than grass and forage, particularly if they are idle, easy keepers, or have low **workload**. Others may need extra support during winter, when grass sugar levels and availability change and the horse may need additional fuel to stay warm. This is where a small amount of concentrate, a balancer, or a full **complete horse feed** can become useful.

The main point is not to think in terms of “hard feed or nothing”. Instead, think in terms of what the diet is missing. If pasture and forage provide plenty of fibre but not enough micronutrients, a balancer may be enough. If the horse is losing weight, a more energy-dense feed may be needed. If the horse has plenty of condition and only light work, adding concentrate may be unnecessary.

Another useful rule is that more feed is not always better. High starch diets can be harder on digestion, especially if the horse is already getting a lot from forage. For living-out horses, the safest approach is usually to improve forage quality first, then add a targeted feed only if required.

How do I select the right horse feed for my horse?

The smartest choice starts with real-world assessment, not labels. Good **horse feed advice uk** centres on the horse in front of you: body condition, workload, age, appetite, forage access, and weather exposure. If you are looking for **horse feed for beginners**, the easiest principle is this: feed to provide for what forage cannot.

A **horse feeding chart** can help you review options, but it should be treated as a guide rather than a fixed formula. A **horse feed calculator uk** tool can also help estimate requirements, especially for energy and ration size. However, it still needs to be compared against the horse’s **body condition score** and actual behaviour, because metabolism varies from horse to horse.

Use body condition, workload, and weather to guide the ration

Start with **body condition score**. If your horse is losing weight, the ration likely needs more **digestible energy** or better-quality forage. If the horse is maintaining condition, keep the diet steady. If the horse is gaining too much, reduce calories and review forage intake before cutting everything else.

Workload matters because exercise changes energy requirements. A horse in light hacking has very different needs from one in regular schooling, competition, or hard work. The more demanding the workload, the more likely it is that forage alone will not cover needs. In colder months, **winter** also increases demand because the horse uses energy to maintain body temperature.

Weather, shelter, and grazing quality all affect the ration. Wet, windy conditions can raise maintenance needs. Poor grazing may reduce forage intake. If the horse cannot eat enough fibre from grass alone, adding hay, haylage, or a suitable bucket feed can help keep the diet balanced.

Where possible, choose feeds based on fibre, sensible starch levels, and predictable digestibility. Horses with higher sensitivity to starch or sugar often do better on forage-led diets with controlled energy rather than cereal-heavy options.

When to use a complete feed, supplement balancer, or simple forage-only diet

A **forage-only** diet works best when pasture or conserved forage is plentiful and the horse stays in good condition. This is often appropriate for easy keepers, retired horses, and some horses in light work. Even then, you should check whether the forage supply is delivering enough **vitamins and minerals**.

A **feed balancer** is often the middle-ground solution. It gives highly concentrated nutrients without much extra bulk or calories. This is especially useful if the horse lives out on good grass but still needs a nutritional safety net. It is a smart option for owners who want to avoid overfeeding while protecting nutrition and *gut health*.

Complete horse feed is useful when the horse needs convenience, extra calories, or a more complete all-in-one ration. It can suit horses whose forage is limited or inconsistent, or owners who want to simplify feeding. Because it is designed as a complete ration, it can lessen the need to add multiple **supplements**.

If the horse needs extra condition, a carefully chosen concentrate may be appropriate, but it should be used with a clear purpose. Avoid choosing feeds simply because they sound “strong” or “rich”. Look at the nutritional analysis, especially starch, sugar, fibre, and energy levels.

How much horse feed should a horse living out get?

There is no single answer, but a useful **horse feeding chart** begins with forage intake and then gives feed according to condition and workload. A **horse feed calculator uk** can estimate the target amount, but the horse’s response is the real test. The aim is to meet requirements without overloading the digestive system.

A practical framework is to think in terms of **dry matter** and **daily ration**. Horses need a substantial amount of dry matter from forage each day, and living-out horses often get a large proportion of that from grazing. If pasture is poor, hay or haylage may need to make up the difference. Only after forage is covered should you decide whether a balancer, complete feed, or concentrate is necessary.

For easy keepers on good grazing, the daily ration may be forage-only with a small balancer. For horses in moderate work or those losing condition, a more calorie-dense complete feed or concentrate may be needed. For horses in heavier work, the ration may require more energy-dense feed, but always introduced gradually and split into **small meals**.

Watch for signs that the amount is wrong: dropping topline, dull coat, excessive weight gain, loose droppings, or reduced energy. If the horse is underperforming or losing condition, review forage quality before increasing concentrates. Often the answer is more or better forage, not just more bucket feed.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost varies with the type of feed, the horse’s size, the amount fed, and the brand. A bag price can seem attractive or expensive on its own, but the better question is the **daily feeding cost**. A lower-cost bag may not be cheaper per day if you have to feed a lot of it, while a more concentrated feed may last longer.

Horse feed companies cost products differently depending on fibre content, balancer formulation, and whether the feed is designed as a complete ration or a concentrate. For example, some premium feeds may cost more per bag but deliver a more complete nutrient package, meaning fewer extra supplements are needed.

When comparing cost, look at:

- bag price and weight
- daily ration recommendation
- whether the feed includes vitamins and minerals

- how much forage still needs to be added
- whether extra supplements are needed

That comparison helps you determine true value rather than just the sticker price. A balanced diet built around forage, with a sensible balancer or complete feed, can often be better value than feeding multiple separate products.

What are the ten principles of giving food to horses?

The **10 rules of feeding horses** are a simple way to keep feeding secure and reliable, especially for horses living out. They support **horse feeding rules** that help maintain digestion, behaviour, and condition.

- Feed mainly **forage** and make fibre the base of the ration.
- Offer **fresh water** throughout the day.
- Offer **small meals** if bucket feeding is required.
- Adjust feed gradually to help protect the gut.
- Tailor the ration to **workload** and condition.
- Monitor **body condition score** regularly.
- Limit **concentrate** feeds when forage is enough.
- Consider **vitamins and minerals** if forage alone is incomplete.
- Promote **hydration**, especially in cold weather or after exercise.
- Review the diet when **weather**, grazing, or work changes.

These rules are simple, but they are effective because they match how horses actually eat and digest. They also help reduce problems linked to sudden ration changes, high starch intake, and inconsistent forage access.

Which horse feed labels and firms are worth comparing?

There are plenty of **horse feed companies** to compare, but the best choice depends on whether you want a balancer, a full conditioning feed, or a high-fibre complete ration. A useful place to begin is to compare nutritional analysis rather than marketing claims. That is where **horse feed advice uk** really helps: compare starch, sugar, fibre, energy, and added micronutrients.

Spillers horse feed is one of the most familiar names in the market, and it is often compared with other established brands for balancers, cubes, and complete feeds. When looking at any brand, ask whether the product suits a living-out horse, not just whether it is popular. A horse with excellent pasture access may not need a rich conditioning feed at all.

What matters most is the **nutritional analysis**. Check whether the feed is designed as a complete ration or only as a supplement to forage. See how much **digestible energy** it provides, whether the starch level is appropriate, and whether it includes the right balance of **vitamins and minerals**. This comparison is more useful than brand loyalty alone.

Can I make a horse feed mix recipe at home?

A home-made **horse feed mix recipe** can be done, but it needs care. The biggest risk is creating a ration that looks practical but is unbalanced in energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals. If you want to use home mixing, keep the ingredients simple and understand the role of each one.

Common components include **oats**, **barley**, and **beet pulp**. Oats and barley add calories, but they also affect starch levels, so they should be used thoughtfully. Beet pulp is a useful fibre source and can support a more forage-led ration. It is often included because it complements *fibre* intake without relying heavily on cereal energy.

If you do make a mix at home, remember that a bucket of grain and fibre is not automatically a complete diet. You will still need to consider **vitamins and minerals**, salt, and the overall balance of the ration. For horses living out, a homemade mix is usually best kept as a targeted addition rather than the full feeding plan unless you have expert nutritional guidance.

For the majority of owners, a commercial **complete horse feed** or balancer is more secure and more reliable. It eliminates much of the uncertainty and cuts the chance of missing essential nutrients.

Quick answers to popular questions

Do horses living out need hard feed?

Not always. If **forage** from **pasture**, hay, or haylage covers the horse's needs and the horse holds a good **body condition score**, hard feed may not be necessary. Many living-out horses do well on forage alone or with a balancer.

What is the best horse feed for a horse living out in winter?

The best option depends on condition and **workload**. In **winter**, a horse may need more energy, so a high-fibre **complete horse feed**, balancer, or additional forage may be appropriate. The aim is to support **digestible energy** without overloading starch.

How do I know if my horse needs a complete horse feed?

If your horse is living out but losing weight, has limited forage access, or [overweight horse feed](#) needs a convenient all-in-one ration, a **complete horse feed** may suit. It is also helpful if you want fewer separate **supplements** and a more consistent nutrient profile.

How much horse feed should I give based on workload and condition?

Use a **horse feeding chart** or **horse feed calculator uk** as a guide, then adjust to the horse's **body condition score**, **workload**, and forage intake. More work and poorer condition usually mean more feed, but always increase gradually and use **small meals**.

What is the cheapest safe way to feed a horse living out?

The cheapest safe approach is usually strong **forage** management first: good pasture, hay, or haylage, plus a low-rate balancer if needed for **vitamins and minerals**. That often gives better value than a large bag of concentrate and is usually better for *gut health* and long-term weight management.