

What shifts in winter feeding for horses?

winter feeding differs because horses use increased **calorie demands** to stay warm, especially in **cold weather**. A well-planned **winter feeding** strategy is not only about increasing more **horse feed**; it is about balancing the whole **winter ration** so it promotes body temperature, condition and **gut health**.

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

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

Another key factor is that winter feed must provide warmth and condition without pushing too much **starch content**. Excess starch can upset the gut, so many owners increase digestible fibre and use **additional 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 assist 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 a forage-first approach, **complete horse feed**, cereal-based **compound feed**, and fibre-led **concentrates**.

A **complete horse feed** is designed 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 consistent **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 helpful for horses that need added calories or a specific nutrient profile. Some are designed for performance, others **low starch competition feed** 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 work with the horse's forage and support **gut health** rather than overwhelming it.

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

- Additional fibre and warmth: prioritise hay or haylage and fibre-based feeds.
- Increased 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 most effective winter strategy is not a dramatic change but a careful adjustment in digestible energy, palatability and fibre intake.

How to choose the right horse feed

When you are looking for **horse feed for beginners**, the easiest rule is this: start with forage, then add only what is needed to support condition and work. Helpful **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 slender 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.

Relying on 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, review the label, and review 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.

Horse feeding guidelines to observe in winter

Solid **horse feeding rules** help keep winter feeding safer and more efficient. The well-known **10 rules of feeding horses** are often presented with slight variation by different professionals, but the core principles stay the same: feed little and often, keep forage available, avoid abrupt changes, keep the ration balanced, and protect **digestive health**.

Initially, 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 support more stable energy levels. Next, 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** at sensible levels. High-starch feeds can be helpful for some horses, but they are not the best default choice in winter. Excess starch may cause gut upset, especially if the horse is already on restricted turnout or has a sensitive digestive system. Fibre and oil are often more suitable long-term energy sources.

Then, 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**. Fifth, 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:

- Make the diet rely on hay or haylage wherever possible.
- Bring in new feeds slowly over 7 to 14 days.
- Do not allow the horse go for long periods without forage.

- Match concentrates to workload, not habit.
- Check the feed label for fibre, starch, energy and added nutrients.
- Offer fresh water at all times, especially when feeding dry hay.
- Apply electrolytes when sweat losses justify them, not as a routine add-on.

Following these rules helps keep the winter ration secure, practical and steady.

How much horse feed should you give?

There is not one simple answer to daily amounts, which is why a **horse feeding chart** is best used as a reference point rather than an exact rule. A practical **horse feed calculator uk** approach looks at weight, roughage quality, 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 simple approach, 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 modest.

A simple chart-style explanation can help:

- **Good-doer, low workload:** ration based mainly on forage, perhaps only a balancer, little or no concentrate feed.
- **Average body condition, light to moderate work:** forage plus small amounts of compound feed.
- **Thin horse or harder-working horse:** better-quality forage, extra digestible energy, and a measured increase in concentrates.
- **Horse needing weight support:** start by increasing forage, then use high-calorie feed only as required.

When using a **horse feeding chart**, remember that feed quantities must reflect the whole diet, 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 horse is holding weight, behaving normally, and showing healthy dung and appetite.

Horse feed cost: how to plan for it

Horse feed cost can vary a lot depending on feed type, quality, your feeding amount 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.

Winter is often the season when feed bills rise because more hay or haylage is needed, and some horses also need more supplementary feed. Budgeting should therefore include:

- Forage costs such as hay or haylage
- Feed concentrates or complete horse feed
- Nutritional balancers and vitamin-mineral support
- Electrolytes if the workload requires them

- Shipping or storage considerations

Different **horse feed companies** structure 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.

Popular names and products to assess

When assessing feeds from different **horse feed companies**, go 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 unneeded 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 content
- 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 balanced, but if the horse refuses it, it is not practical. Good palatability supports consistent intake, which is important for horses that need to maintain weight or recover condition.

Is it possible to make your own horse feed mix?

Yes, you can create a **horse feed mix recipe**, but it should be done carefully. A home mix can be useful 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 maintain a balanced ration 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.

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

- Start with the forage ration first.
- Decide whether the horse needs extra calories, protein or micronutrients.

- Add a balancer before increasing cereal volume.
- Use oats or barley only if the horse genuinely needs more digestible energy.
- Review body condition and behaviour regularly.

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.

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Fast 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 sums up the basics of **horse feed advice uk**: match the feed to 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 ideal **horse feed** for winter feeding is usually built around forage, with hay or haylage as the mainstay and a suitable balancer or concentrate added only if the horse needs more energy or nutrients. The best choice depends on workload, body condition and forage quality. For many horses, a fibre-based 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 more energy the horse uses to stay warm. Start with enough forage to support gut health, then add feed quantities steadily 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 guide 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 formulated 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 thoroughly.

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 alongside practical observation. If the horse is losing weight, gaining too much, or showing changes in gut health, the ration needs changing.

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 steady management, not sudden changes or overfeeding.

Common horse feeding mistakes to avoid

A major one of the most common errors is **overfeeding**. Many people often add extra bucket feed when the horse really needs better forage, a balancer or a more suitable feed formulation. Overfeeding can lead to wasted money, excess weight and a less stable digestive system. Another major error is allowing **restricted forage** for too long. These animals 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.