

What horse feed refers to and why the type matters

Picking the right **horse feed** is about much more than simply filling a bucket. The best diet helps support the **digestive system**, helps preserve a healthy **body condition score**, and fits the horse's **workload**, age and temperament. With so many **types of horse feed** available, it is easy to complicate the process, but the basics are straightforward: begin with a solid forage base, then add **hard feed** only when it is needed.

A horse's nutritional needs change with season, condition, exercise and recovery status. A youngster, a leisure horse, and a **performance horse** will not need the same ration. That is why grasping the different feed types matters. The right choice helps support **gut health**, stable **energy levels**, good **conditioning** and sensible **weight management**. The wrong choice can add to **laminitis risk**, reduce **digestibility** or disrupt the horse's routine.

Good **horse feeding rules** always begin with forage and steady daily management. In most cases, a **balanced diet** is built around **roughage** and then adjusted with concentrated energy, vitamins and minerals. Some horses do well on a **complete horse feed**, while others need a simple forage-plus-supplement approach. The key is to align the feed to the horse rather than following trends.

The chief types of horse feed explained

The main **types of horse feed** fall into a few clear categories: **forage**, including **grass**, **hay** and **haylage**; and **hard feed**, which includes **concentrates**, **mixes**, **cubes**, **pellets**, and feeds based on ingredients such as **bran**, **oats** and **beet pulp**. Some feeds are formulated to supply energy, others to boost fibre intake, and others to complete the vitamin and mineral profile.

Fodder is the foundation. Hard feed is the addition. That simple distinction helps owners avoid overfeeding and keeps the diet anchored around fibre. Many modern feeding plans also factor in forage quality, palatability and digestibility, because these directly affect how much a horse will eat and how well it can use the nutrients.

Forage-led feeding: grass, hay and haylage

Forage is the key part of a horse's daily ration. It includes **grass** grazing, **hay** and **haylage**. These feeds supply **fibre**, encourage the horse's natural chewing behaviour and help keep the digestive system working steadily. For most horses, forage should form the bulk of the diet, with hard feed used only as a supplement.

Grass can be highly nutritious, but its quality changes with the season and growing conditions. It may provide plenty of energy, so owners of good-doers need to watch intake carefully. **Hay** is the traditional stable forage. It is usually more controlled than grass, and its quality can vary widely depending on cutting, storage and maturity. Good hay supports **roughage** intake and is often the simplest way to build a reliable feeding plan.

Haylage is made with a higher moisture content than hay and is wrapped to preserve it. It can be highly palatable and is often useful for horses that need encouragement to eat. However, forage quality must be checked carefully, because haylage can be richer than hay. That can be helpful for some horses, but it is not always suitable for those prone to weight gain or **laminitis risk**.

When comparing grass, hay and haylage, think about the horse's condition, exercise and how much natural grazing is available. A horse with a heavier **workload** may do well on more energy-dense forage, while a horse needing **weight management** may fare better with controlled hay with careful monitoring.

Concentrates, mixes and cubes

Concentrates are feeds designed to pack nutrients or energy into smaller volumes than forage. This group includes **mixes** and **cubes**, as well as **pellets** in many feeding programmes. They are often used when a horse needs more calories, more protein, or more assistance for training and recovery.

A **horse feed mix** usually combines ingredients such as cereals, fibre sources, added oils and supplements. A **horse feed mix recipe** may differ between one brand to another, but the aim is generally to offer a practical, palatable ration that supports energy and condition. Some owners like the flexibility of a mix because it can be adapted with other ingredients, though the balance must always be checked carefully.

Cubes and **pellets** are often more uniform than mixes. They can be useful where consistent intake matters, and they are sometimes preferred for horses that sort their feed. **Pellets** may also be easier to measure, which helps with ration planning and daily intake control. The best form depends on the horse's preferences, chewing ability and nutritional needs.

Ingredients such as **bran**, **oats** and **beet pulp** are common in this category. **Oats** have traditionally been used for quick-release energy, though they are not ideal for every horse. **Beet pulp** is a useful fibre source and can help add condition without relying too heavily on starch. **Bran** may appear in some feeds, but it should be used with care and not treated as a universal solution.

Many owners select branded products from well-known **horse feed companies** because they want consistent formulations, testing and feeding support. Brands such as **spillers horse feed** are broadly recognised, but the name on the bag matters less than whether the feed suits the horse's workload, body condition and digestive health.

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All-in-one horse feed and when to use it

A **complete horse feed** is designed to provide a more more balanced ration in one product, often combining energy, fibre, **vitamins** and **minerals**. It can be a useful option for owners who want ease, especially when forage is the main part of the diet but additional coverage is needed for overall nutrition.

This type of feed can be beneficial for horses that need a consistent **balanced diet** without building a ration from several separate ingredients. It is often selected for convenience, especially where careful measuring and routine matter. A complete feed may also help reduce the risk of nutritional gaps, provided it is fed at the recommended rate.

It is crucial not to assume that every complete feed suits every horse. Some are greater in energy, while others focus on fibre and low-starch support. Horses with sensitive digestive systems, a tendency to gain weight, or specific health issues may need a low-starch option. Always check whether the feed supports the horse's current condition and exercise level.

Horse feeding guidelines that every owner should know

Proper **horse feeding rules** make daily feeding more safe and more efficient. One good place to start is one of the classic **10 rules of feeding horses**: provide plenty of forage, introduce changes slowly, keep feeding times

consistent, provide clean water, and match energy intake to work. These fundamentals help support **digestive health** and support a stable routine.

One of the most important rules is to keep **starch** under control where possible. High-starch rations can sometimes be appropriate, but excess starch can strain the gut and make digestive issues more likely. Horses are designed to graze, so fibre should always lead the ration. For that reason roughage plays such a big role for **colic prevention** and overall comfort.

Another key rule is to avoid sudden feed changes. The microbial population in the digestive system needs time to adapt, and abrupt changes can disrupt gut health. Any adjustment to hay, haylage, hard feed or supplements should be introduced slowly over several days. Consistency also matters for behaviour; horses often cope better when their feeding schedule remains predictable.

Another practical rule about not relying on feed alone to fix poor management. A horse that lacks adequate forage, turnout or exercise may not improve simply because the bucket feed changes. Feeding should fit into the wider management picture, not replace it.

Building a horse feeding chart

A **horse feeding chart** is a simple way to pair feed amounts to the horse's **age, workload** and **body condition score**. It does not need to be complex. Start by noting the horse's current condition, how much forage it eats, what exercise it does, and whether it needs to gain, lose or maintain weight.

After that, build the ration around forage, then decide whether hard feed is required. The chart should show what the horse eats, how much, and when. It may include forage type, feed brand, supplements and any planned changes. This is especially helpful if more than one person handles feeding, because it keeps the routine steady.

It is sensible to review the chart regularly. Weight, workload and appetite can change over time, and the horse's nutritional needs can change with them. A chart should be a living guide rather than a fixed document.

Feeding according to age, workload and condition

A **foal** needs a quite different feeding plan from an **adult horse**, and a **senior horse** may need additional support than either. Growth, maintenance and ageing all influence digestion, chewing ability and nutrient use. Younger horses often need careful support for development, while older horses may need easier-to-chew feeds and more attention to protein, fibre and digestibility.

An **adult horse** in light work may do well on forage with little or no hard feed, depending on **condition**. A horse that is losing weight may need more calories, while a horse that is too round may need restricted energy intake and better forage management. **Workload** is a major factor because exercise increases energy demand and can influence the type of feed required.

A **performance horse** usually needs a ration that supports stamina, recovery and muscle function. The aim is not simply to add more feed, but to create the right balance of forage, concentrate and micronutrients. Some horses in work do well with fibre and oil-based energy sources rather than large cereal meals.

How many forage and hard feed to provide

The quantity of **roughage** a horse receives is essential to feeding success. In practice, roughage should form the majority of the diet, with hard feed added only as needed. A practical **ration** starts with enough hay, haylage or grass to promote chewing time, gut fill and digestive health.

When calculating the **feed bucket**, consider the horse's total **daily intake** rather than only the volume of one meal. A bigger horse in heavy work may demand more concentrate, but even then the ration should be split into practical meals rather than served in one heavy serving. This supports digestion and helps avoid unnecessary strain on the gut.

The amount of hard feed should be based on body condition, energy output and forage quality. If forage is good enough and the horse holds condition well, more hard feed may not be needed at all. If the horse needs conditioning, use a gradual increase and monitor response carefully.

Equine feed cost and budgeting tips

Horse feed cost varies a lot according to the type of feed, the required amount, and the brand. Owners often ask **how much does horse feed cost**, but the actual answer depends on the horse's individual needs. A horse on mainly grazing feed may cost much less to feed than one needing a high specification performance ration.

Planning is simpler when you think in terms of daily feeding rather than only bag price. A more expensive feed may turn out to be economical if the horse needs less of it, or if it enhances body condition and reduces waste. Comparing products from different **horse feed companies** can help you manage cost and nutrition.

A useful tool is a **horse feed calculator uk**, which can help work out daily quantities and cost based on the horse's size, workload and body condition. While calculators are not a substitute for judgement, they are useful for planning and for understanding how much different feeding strategies may cost over a week or month.

When budgeting, remember to include forage, supplements and wastage. A feed that is cheap per bag can become expensive if the horse sorts it, drops it or refuses it. Palatability, digestibility and feeding efficiency all affect the final **horse feed cost**.

Feed basics for beginners: basic first steps

For **horse feed for beginners**, the best approach is usually straightforward and consistent. Start with good grazing, fresh water and a consistent routine. Then assess whether the horse truly needs hard feed. Many owners find that this alone solves more problems than switching between multiple products.

Good **horse feed advice uk** often emphasizes observation over complexity. Watch the horse's coat, appetite, [digestible fibre laminitis feed](#) droppings, energy and body shape. If the horse is bright, maintaining weight and working comfortably, the ration may already be appropriate. If not, make one change at a time and monitor the result.

A **horse feed calculator uk** can be helpful for beginners who are unsure about quantity, especially if they are learning to manage a **stable routine**. Set feeding times, measure portions carefully and avoid making changes on impulse. The goal is to gain confidence and routine.

Choosing the right feed for your horse

The ideal feed choice depends on **condition**, **temperament**, **digestibility** and **palatability**. A calm horse that holds weight easily may need only roughage and perhaps a balancer. A sharper horse may do better on a reduced-starch ration that supports steady energy rather than excitement. Horses with poor teeth, slower digestion or age-related changes may need feeds that are easier to chew and more digestible.

Nature matters because some horses become fizzy on cereal-heavy rations, while others need more energy to stay in top shape. Palatability matters too; a feed that is nutritionally correct but left in the bucket is not useful.

Digestibility should never be overlooked, because a feed that looks impressive on paper may not suit the horse's gut health in practice.

In many cases, the right answer is a forage-led ration with a modest hard feed top-up. That keeps the diet practical, supports the digestive system and reduces the chance of unnecessary excess.

Frequent mistakes to avoid when feeding horses

One of the key mistakes is **overfeeding**. Too much is not always better, especially for horses that are already in good condition or not working hard. Overfeeding can lead to weight gain, wasted feed and, in some cases, increased **laminitis** risk.

Underfeeding is just as problematic. A horse that does not receive enough forage or energy may lose condition, lack stamina and struggle to recover after work. Underfeeding can also lead to frustration, poor behaviour and reduced overall welfare.

Another regular mistake is ignoring forage quality and focusing only on hard feed. If the base of the diet is weak, the whole ration suffers. Likewise, giving too much **starch** or large meals in one go can upset the digestive system and raise the risk of **colic**. Preventing digestive trouble depends on routine, forage and sensible ration sizes.

In the end, many handlers adjust feed too fast. Every change to [overweight horse feed](#) hay, haylage, concentrates or supplements should be slow. That is one of the easiest and most effective **horse feeding rules** for maintaining digestive health and supporting stable feeding behaviour.

FAQ: horse feed questions resolved

What are the primary types of horse feed?

The primary **types of horse feed** are forage and bought feed. Forage includes **grass**, **hay** and **haylage**. Hard feed contains **concentrates**, **mixes**, **cubes** and **pellets**, plus ingredient-based options using **bran**, **oats** and **beet pulp**. The best choice depends on age, condition and workload.

What should I feed my horse if I am a beginner?

If you are new to **horse feed for beginners**, start with good forage, clean water and a consistent routine. Many horses do well on forage alone or forage with a small, balanced top-up. Take simple **horse feed advice uk**, keep changes gradual and monitor condition closely before adding more hard feed.

How should I use a horse feeding chart?

A **horse feeding chart** lets you note what the horse eats, how much, and why. Base it on **age**, **workload** and **body condition score**. Review it regularly and adjust the ration as the horse's needs change. A chart is most useful when it reflects real feeding habits rather than guesswork.

How much does horse feed cost on average?

Horse feed cost depends on forage, concentrate choice and how much the horse needs. Asking **how much does horse feed cost** has no single answer, because a horse on mainly hay or grass will cost less than a **performance horse** on a high-spec ration. A **horse feed calculator uk** can help estimate the budget more accurately.

What is complete horse feed and when should it be used?

Complete horse feed is a product designed to provide a more fully balanced ration, often including energy, fibre, **vitamins** and **minerals**. It is helpful when you want convenience or need to support a **balanced diet** without combining multiple feeds. It should be used according to the horse's nutritional needs, especially if you are managing condition, workload or digestive health.