



20 Things

Every New Horse Owner Should Know

This tipsheet reviews the basics of horse care and includes a list of resources essential for horse owners.

Owning a horse is a big responsibility and a commitment of time, energy, finances and resources. AND, it can be an extremely rewarding and exciting experience when it's all done well. The following 20 points review basic requirements for owning and caring for an adult horse. You can use this checklist to review your current horse management program or to assist you in determining if you are ready to take on horse ownership. Keep in mind that you should always consult your veterinarian on the health care program best for your horses or if you have problems or questions.

- 1 Strong, tight fencing.** Barbed wire or field fencing should not be used with horses, especially for confinement areas or small paddocks. Barbed wire was developed for cattle which have thick skins and react differently when caught in a fence. Field fencing can be difficult for horses to see and horses can easily get a foot caught through the large holes. Whatever fencing you choose, reinforce it with a strand of hot wire along the inside (chest height on the horse). This will provide a psychological barrier for the horse that they are likely to respect. Any type of wire should be tight and frequently checked for loosening. Make a habit of walking your fence lines regularly and inspecting them for problems such as loose rails or protruding nails.
- 2 Shelter.** A horse needs shelter and protection from the heat, driving rain and severe cold. During the winter months horses should have a place where they can be out of the mud and wet for at least half the day. This can be as simple as a good tree in a pasture or a three-sided shed closed on the side of prevailing winds. A three-sided run-in shed with a field or large paddock are excellent and may be the most natural for a horse. Stall size for a horse should be 12' x 12' and 10' x 10' for a small horse or pony. Flooring should be dry and level – rubber mats on top of 6 inches of gravel are excellent and reduce the amount of shavings needed. Packed clay will work but will erode and get uneven after a time. Concrete and wood are slick and hard and should not be used as flooring for horse stalls. Walls should be strong, smooth, free of protrusions and at least 7 feet high. A foot of space between the top of the wall and the ceiling will allow for air movement and good ventilation. Also, walls should extend to the ground so that a horse cannot get its legs caught under them.
- 3 Clean pasture.** Inspect your pastures regularly to make sure there are no sharp objects horses can be hurt on. Equipment and other implements should not be stored in horse areas. Watering and feeding containers should be free of rusty edges and sharp corners. Be sure your pastures are free of poisonous plants. Contact your local county Cooperative Extension, Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or Agriculture Canada office for more information on pasture management and plants toxic to livestock.
- 4 Clean, dry place to eat.** The preferable location for a horse to be fed is in a clean, well ventilated stall or shelter. It is most natural for a horse to eat with its head lowered – this helps clear their respiratory system. *Never* feed in mud – feeding on sand or muddy ground leads to ingestion of dirt and serious digestion problems. Good feeding options for hay and grain include flat, open grain pans or boxes, rubber mats, upside down carpet, or firm, dry sod.





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- 5 Minimum twice a day feedings.** Alfalfa hay is higher in protein and energy, but for most horses grass hay (such as Timothy) or a mix of grass and alfalfa would be best. Horses should be supplemented with grain only if a horse cannot maintain its weight on hay alone. A good rule of thumb for feeding hay is 1 and a half pounds of hay per 100 pounds of body weight. This would be 15 pounds of hay for an average 1,000 pound horse. Always purchase green, leafy hay free of dust and mold. A horse should never be fed hay or grain that is moldy, dusty, weedy or that contains foreign objects. Make any diet changes gradually over a period of days. Consult your veterinarian for the feeding program best suited for your horse.
- 6 Water.** A horse drinks 8 to 12 gallons of water per day. Water should be fresh and available at all times. Be sure your horse's water container is free of rough edges and rust. It should be scrubbed clean of algae and dirt regularly. Be especially careful in cold weather that your horse's water is not frozen or too cold or they may not drink an adequate amount.
- 7 Freedom from competition.** Separate horses to feed them. This prevents fights, injuries and weight loss problems. Don't overstock your pastures or crowd horses together.
- 8 Selenium supplement.** We live in a selenium deficient part of the world, therefore selenium should be supplemented to all horses in the Pacific Northwest. Horse Guard, Dynamite, and Northwest Supplement are examples of vitamin supplements containing adequate amounts of selenium. Pure selenium is also available from your veterinarian or veterinary supply catalogs. Consult your veterinarian on the correct dosage.
- 9 Salt block or loose salt.** Salt should be available at all times.
- 10 Vaccinations.** Consult your veterinarian for their specific recommendations for the vaccination program they recommend for your area. Basic vaccination requirements include:
 - Tetanus** – once a year
 - West Nile** – consult with your veterinarian
 - Influenza and Rhinopneumonitis** – minimum of once or twice a year (stabled or show horses may need it more often – consult your veterinarian)
 - Encephalomyelitis (East/West)** – once a year in spring or summer
- 11 Dental exam.** A horse's teeth are continually erupting so yearly dental exams should be done by a veterinarian.
- 12 Hoof care.** Horses need regular hoof care, even for a horse that is not being ridden. A horse should have his feet trimmed by a knowledgeable farrier (a horse shoer) approximately every 8 weeks. Be sure to regularly clean and inspect your horse's feet.
- 13 Deworming.** Paste wormers can be purchased at feed stores or from veterinary supply catalogs. All horses should be dewormed regularly, usually every 6-8 weeks. Your veterinarian may recommend certain types and rotation schedules. Stalls and confinement areas should have manure removed from them. This will avoid re-exposing your horse to worm larva which hatch every 1 to 3 days.





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- 14 Fly mask during fly season and a good residual fly repellent.** Your local county Cooperative Extension, Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or Agriculture Canada office have more information available on insect control (including biological insect control) for livestock owners.
- 15 First aid kit.** A well-stocked first aid kit is important to have on hand for emergencies as well as for caring for wounds or scrapes. Consult your veterinarian for their recommendations on first aid supplies to keep handy. A gym bag or overnight suitcase works well for holding (and carrying) your first aid supplies.
- 16 Pasture and manure management program.** Maintaining healthy pastures and planning for regular manure disposal are important aspects of horse care. A 1,000 pound horse produces about 45 pounds of manure per day, equaling about 1 cubic foot per day. With bedding that comes to 2 cubic feet per day. You can put together a plan to utilize the manure as compost in pastures, garden or lawn, or arrange to haul it away. In addition to managing manure, keeping pastures healthy can be a challenge. Restricting grazing during the wet season can protect grass plants and prevent mud. Most pastures simply cannot survive overgrazing or constant trampling during the winter months. For information or help with pasture, manure and mud management contact your local county Cooperative Extension, Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service or Agriculture Canada office.
- 17 Storage area.** A clean, dry and convenient area free of rodents is necessary for storing tack, bedding, feed and simple equipment. Store all grain in rodent-proof metal containers. Be sure to secure this area from the possibility of your horse getting into it.
- 18 Access to equine professionals.** Some of the equine professionals you will need to locate include a veterinarian, a farrier (shoer), a feed store/hay dealer and possibly a horse trainer or riding instructor. Talk with fellow horseowners for their recommendations. Make arrangements to meet and observe their veterinarian, farrier or instructor when they come for an appointment. For information and help with pasture, manure and mud management contact your local county Cooperative Extension, Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service or Agriculture Canada office.
- 19 Farm equipment.** Equipment does not need to be elaborate or expensive, especially in a small setup. A manure fork and a wheelbarrow are most important and will get you a long way.
- 20 Time, energy, finances and resources.** It is important that you realize and are prepared for the extent of commitment horsekeeping requires. If you are a new at owning horses perhaps you might want to take lessons first and offer to work around the stables. This will give you an opportunity to learn more about horses and see firsthand what caring for horses entails.

After reviewing these basic horse care requirements you can revise your current horse management program or decide if you are ready to embark on the horse ownership journey.

Good luck and good horsekeeping to you!





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Check Out Your Resources!

If you are interested in additional information, these resources are available to horseowners:

- **Horses for Clean Water** A program run and supported by horseowners promoting environmentally sensitive horsekeeping which offers classes, workshops and farm tours on topics such as mud, manure and pasture management, composting, wildlife enhancement, horse health, preparing your horse farm for winter, and more! HCW also offers educational materials and products for sale and individual farm consultations. For more on HCW educational opportunities, or to be on the listserv to receive information about future educational events contact Program Director Alayne Blicke at 425-432-6116 or alayne@horsesforcleanwater.com. Visit the HCW website at <http://www.horsesforcleanwater.com> to view the archives of The Green Horse, as well as to sign up to have it delivered directly to your e-mail inbox every month! Purchasing books through the Amazon.com link on the Horses for Clean Water website will help support HCW programs.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)** Governmental agency which works with farmers and ranchers on issues relating to wise use of the natural resources, such as pasture, manure and mud management. You can find the number for your NRCS office listed in the phone book under federal government, US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service.
- **Conservation Districts (CDs)** Agencies which work with farmers and livestock owners, often for smaller, non-commercial places on similar land management practices. You can contact your local Conservation District by calling the NRCS office. The NRCS will be able to tell you the name, address and phone number of your Conservation District.
- **Cooperative Extension** Contact your county cooperative extension office to get more information on pasture and manure management for horses, as well as composting. They can be located in the phone book under your state land-grant university (if you have trouble locating them ask for help from your public library's reference librarian).

Purchase these books through the Amazon.com link on the Horses for Clean Water website to support HCW programs:

- **Horsekeeping on a Small Acreage** by Cherry Hill An excellent book by Cherry Hill which contains information on horse facility design and management.
- **Horse Housing: How to Plan, Build and Remodel Barns and Sheds** by Richard Klimesh and Cherry Hill
- **How to Be Your Own Vet (Sometimes)** by Ruth James, DVM
- **Riding for the Rest of Us** by Dr. Jessica Jahiel Dr. Jahiel is an international clinician, trainer and author who teaches and trains according to classical dressage principles. Her program, Holistic Horsemanship®, encourages a "holistic" approach to understanding and working with horses. Her techniques encompass all breeds and disciplines emphasizing communication between horse and rider. Dr. Jahiel also is the moderator of Horse-Sense, a weekly electronic Q & A newsletter





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about horses, riding, and training as well as being a regular speaker on the syndicated radio program Rick Lamb's The Horse Show. For more information on Horse-Sense, send e-mail to listproc@prairienet.org with the message text: info horse-sense . Visit Jessica's Web site at <http://www.horse-sense.org/>

- **The United States Pony Club Manual of Horsemanship** by Susan Harris
- **Horse Industry Handbook**, a guide to equine care and management American Youth Horse Council (Available through the American Youth Horse Council, 606-259-2742).
- **Horse Handling and Grooming**, a step-by-step photographic guide by Cherry Hill
- **Horse Health Care**, a step-by-step photographic guide by Cherry Hill
- **Roofs and Rails**, How to Plan Your Ideal Horse Facility by Gavin Ehringer
- **Complete Plans for Building Horse Barns Big and Small** by Nancy Ambrosiano and Mary Harcourt

