

Fall Checklist for Preparing Your Horse Property for Winter

By [Alayne](#)

19 Aug 2011



Now is the time to clean as well as make needed repairs or additions to your roof runoff system.

Even though we're in the midst of the lazy, hazy dog days of summer, now is actually the time to be planning ahead for the winter months. Whether winter in your region means snow or just rain, winter in North America usually brings some type of hassle for horse owners. Tackle the hassle by making your horse property as chore-efficient as possible.

Here is a checklist of fall horse property chores to go through during the next few months in order to better prepare yourself and your horses for the upcoming winter months.

Buy your winter supply of hay. Be sure to look for green, leafy, fresh-smelling hay without mold, weeds, dust or discoloration. Most recent nutritional recommendations are that a horse should receive 2% of its body weight in hay (or forage) per day. For the "average" 1,000-pound horse with moderate exercise, that will be about 20 pounds of hay per day or about 600 pounds of hay per month. Since hay is usually sold in bulk by the ton (2,000 pounds), one ton of hay will last about three and 1/3 months per average-sized horse. So, do the math to determine how many tons of hay you'll need for the winter. If you don't have the room for storing that volume of hay, perhaps a horsey

neighbor might. Two (or more) of you could go in on the purchase of the hay and reduce the cost for all. Another point to consider is that a couple of extra pounds of hay fed on extremely cold nights is the best heat source you can provide your horse. Body heat generated by eating and digesting the hay will help keep your horse warm. One final suggestion; avoid over or under feeding your horse by always weighing hay (and grain!) Feeding by eye or scoop is not accurate and wastes feed--and money.

Purchase bedding for the wet months. Pelleted beddings are readily available and are a cost-effective alternative that are highly absorbent and compost well. Pelleted beddings come bagged and with the addition of a cover you may be able to store them outside in a very small area. Horse health benefits include that they are very low in dust, a concern if either you or your horse have respiratory issues.

Bring in footing material for paddocks, confinement areas and other high-traffic areas. Now is the time to think about the hogfuel (chipped wood), gravel (1/2 to 5/8 inch crushed rock) or sand (coarse washed) needed for footing in sacrifice areas, paddocks, walkways, and in front of gates. These materials are more available now before demand is high. Plus, it is much easier for delivery trucks to back into paddocks and drive through pastures now rather than once these areas have become slick or muddy.

Begin a manure management program. If you don't already pick up manure on a regular basis, NOW is the time to start doing so. A horse creates 50 pounds of manure per day. When mixed with rainwater over the winter months, this quickly turns into 50 pounds of mud per day. Picking up manure on a regular basis it will greatly decrease that amount of mud on your farm over the winter months. All manure should be picked up at least every three days in stalls, paddocks, confinement areas and high-traffic areas.

Tarp your manure piles. This will help keep the nutrients you are trying to save IN the compost and not allow them to get washed OUT into the surface waters where they can cause a potential problem. Be sure to store manure as far away as possible from streams, ditches or wetlands to avoid potential environmental problems.

Spread compost. Early fall is a great time to spread compost. Compost is a rich soil enhancement. It adds micro and macronutrients and replenishes beneficial bacteria that improve the health of soil and plants. Spread compost in pastures in early fall no more than 1/2 inch thick and no more than three to four inches per season in the same place.

Check gutters and downspouts. Now is the time to clean and make needed repairs or additions to your roof runoff system. Think "keep clean rainwater clean" by diverting

rainwater away from your paddocks to areas where it won't get contaminated. Good places to divert to include areas on your property such as a grassy swales, dry wells, rain barrels, stock watering tanks, well-vegetated woods, or an unused portion of your pasture. Doing this will GREATLY benefit you by reducing the amount of mud your horse spends the winter standing in and making daily chores easier for you.

Reroute surface water runoff. Runoff from driveways, parking areas and hillsides adjacent to confinement areas can add significantly to the problem of managing mud. Ditches, grassy swales, dry wells, water diversion bars and culverts are all useful means for diverting water away from confinement areas and barns. It is considerably easier to build these now than during the next downpour.

Bring your horses in off your pastures. If you're lucky enough to have pasture, now is the time to baby it. Pastures grazed too closely in the autumn will be subject to winter damage and are slow to start growth in the spring. It's best if you allow the grass plants to produce a good amount of leaf growth for winter protection--at least four inches. During the winter months, pastures simply cannot survive trampling and continuous grazing. Pasture plants are dormant and aren't able to regrow. Also, soils are saturated and easily compacted during our soggy winters. A good option for managing your horses during this time is to create a winter paddock or sacrifice area. Confine your horses to this area during the winter and in the summer when pastures become overgrazed.



Alayne Bickle/TheHorse.com

Adequate outdoor lighting will help with paddock manure pick-up chores during the dark winter months.

Review your lighting needs. Do you have adequate outdoor lighting? Are your stalls bright enough to care for your horses during our dark fall and winter evenings? When you're feeding at night, will you have enough light to see if the hay you're feeding is green—or could it be moldy? Would you be better able to do your manure pick-up chores in the paddocks if you had flood lighting? Have you been meaning to put in lighting along walkways or drives? Get an electrician in now and get that work done instead of waiting until temperatures are freezing and you're trying to feed by flashlight.

Review equipment needs for daily chores. Having the right equipment for chores not only makes things more efficient, but also insures that you'll be more likely to get those chores accomplished when it's dark and cold. Consider getting that manure cart that's easy to push and dump into the compost pile. Is your manure fork half broken? The heavy-duty plastic-tined type with a bent edge is made specifically for cleaning horse stalls and paddocks. Wooden handles or ones wrapped with tennis grip tape (or even vet wrap) are easier--and warmer--to grip than metal handles.

It is a good feeling to be prepared as possible even though there is undoubtedly some adventure lurking around the corner. However, it is a safe bet that following this checklist will keep you ahead of the majority of problems, have you better prepared for the coming winter months and in a good position for next summer!

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Comments

Don't forget your horse watering items so they don't freeze.

Cindy

19 Aug 2011 9:45 PM

Remember to bring in meds/sprays/etc that might freeze in your barn.

Tina

22 Aug 2011 8:08 PM

Also a good time to thoroughly clean, condition, and check tack for needed repairs.

Update first aid kits to handle winter needs and check expiration dates on meds to replace if needed.

Candace

23 Aug 2011 2:57 PM

Don't forget blankets and sheets. Repair or replace when you don't need them, rather than when the temp dips below 0 with a driving wind.

Deborah

23 Aug 2011 4:09 PM

Truck and tractor tune ups and trailer maint. not fun to do in cold weather!!

perri

24 Aug 2011 9:54 AM

Flip the breaker to turn on the heat for your automatic waterers.

Kim

25 Aug 2011 9:05 PM

Prevent difficult paddock access by balancing gates, lubricating hinges and latches with no freeze graphite or grease (like the material put in car locks in the winter.)

Alayne

29 Aug 2011 5:22 PM

This is a really great blog post and checklist for getting ready. Winter is pretty much upon us in the Midwest, so I hope everyone has prepared. I have trouble every year with the cold and feeling like I want to bring my animals inside, the bitter months of jan, feb, march almost seem unbearable. Here's to father winter, may he be gentle with us this year!

Emmy

www.probioticsmart.com/.../a

Emmy

28 Oct 2011 5:46 PM

- See more at: <http://cs.thehorse.com/blogs/smart-horse-keeping/archive/2011/08/19/fall-checklist-for-preparing-your-horse-property-for-winter.aspx#sthash.ApZ7a4NN.dpuf>