

Where Do I Begin for Feeding My Horse?

Whether you're a first time horse owner or have cared for your horses for years there are a few key nutrition factors that will have your horses in tip top shape in no time. When we take into consideration how our horse's bodies are designed we know that they are built to eat a little bit and move... and move a lot. So creating an environment to accommodate that will go a long way to keeping your horses healthy and emergencies to a minimum. Look into the Paddock Paradise or Track System set up for your horses' environment.

Forage

The foundation for a horse's diet is forage. Feeding a combination of grass and hay is beneficial. Too much grass can create problems like laminitis, loose stools and even colic for some horses. Be aware of this and know your horse and its breed. There are certain breeds of horses (Morgans and Haflingers) that are very hardy and do NOT do well on a steady diet of rich grass.

You'll want to test your hay (many feed stores will offer this service) so that you know what is either lacking or abundant in your hay. This will help you to know what you need to supplement to benefit your horse's overall health.

Water

Offering fresh water daily is extremely important. In the wild, the horses' whole range revolves around water holes. Having multiple water locations for your horses to visit will get them moving which benefits their digestive system and decreases risks like colic. Keeping well hydrated also decreases the colic risk. In cold temperatures, be sure you are keeping the water from freezing so your horses can drink freely. Consider a filter system if your water tests high in iron. Too much iron will show itself in hoof and other health problems.

Salt

Salt is a necessity. Providing it in granular form is needed in order to ingest the amount needed. It is also fine to add to their feed. If you have your horses on a track, create an area where your horses can dig with their

hooves to get at small chunks of salt that you've provided. For an averaged sized horse they need 1 oz per day of salt, 2-4 oz in hot weather.

Minerals

Minerals are one of the most overlooked things in a horse's diet yet they impact every single function of the body! They even affect their emotional state! Some of the key minerals for general and hoof health are...

Zinc (450 mg) Copper (150mg) Selenium (1-2 mg) Sulfur

Having ratios for a few others are key as well. Calcium: Phosphorus 2:1

Calcium: Magnesium 2:1 Iron: Copper 4:1 Copper: Zinc: Manganese 1:3:3

Vitamins

Vitamins are another key component of your horse's wellness involving such aspects as energy levels, amino acid metabolism, cell integrity and even causing nervousness without adequate levels. Vitamins B6 (Pyridoxine) and B7 (Biotin) are necessary building blocks for health too. Vitamin E is necessary to avoid oxidative damage to cells throughout the body in muscles, nerves and immune cells. This would show up as muscle soreness and or slow recovery time.

Feed Base

Offering an alternative to concentrated grain is ideal for your horse's health. I like Flax because it offers essential fatty acids in the same proportions as grass (that means the omega -3's to 6's are in the right amounts). I feed flax because my horses live on a track (no grass) and are on hay year round ...therefore they need the fatty acids that are no longer available in dried grass.

Chia seeds are also a good option but are a bit lower in the Omega 3's. There are also options like forage cubes, chopped forage, forage pellets and beet pulp. All make great carriers for powdered supplements. And adding water to the feed and even some apple cider vinegar is a great thing to do to increase your horse's water intake, coat the feed for the supplements to stick and avoid any possible choking situations.

Questions? Or 1:1 Help? Contact me @ martamerrick.com

