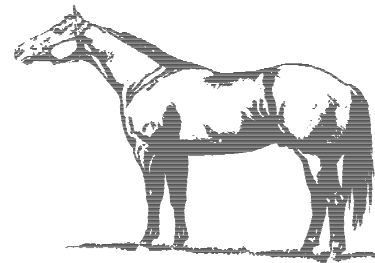


## **Animal Science Horse Information Series**

**Phone: 865-974-7294**

**Fax: 865-974-7297**

**<http://www.agriculture.utk.edu/ansci/horses/horses.htm>**



### **Managing Your Horse in “Cold” Weather**

**Dr. Frederick Harper  
Extension Horse Specialist  
Animal Science Department  
University of Tennessee**

**Single digit temperature is cold. We put on extra cloths, drink hot coffee or chocolate and stay inside as much as possible out of the freezing cold weather.**

**What can horse owners do for their animals when the temperature drops below freezing?**

**Horse owners need to consider shelter, feed and water when the temperature drops below freezing in the daytime and into the single digits at night.**

**If it is raining or snowing, cold wind removes body heat trapped in the horse’s long winter haircoat, making them colder if they are outside. Horses need some protection from such cold, wet weather. It is these conditions that the horse owner must guard against.**

**A windbreak can be helpful. This can be as simple as a stand of trees, a side of a barn or other building as long as it allows the horse to get out of the prevailing wind.**

**Some owners may think that the horse must be placed in a barn or stall. While that is an option, it is not absolutely necessary. If there is no place for the horse to be protected from the wind, then a stall or barn is satisfactory.**

**Run-in shelters are often used in pastures for horse shelter. One can observe horses standing outside such sheds in cold and even wet weather. Nature provides the horse with a good insulation blanket in the form of a long winter haircoat. Providing a windbreak or run-in shed gives horses a place to retreat out of inclement winter weather.**

**When the temperature drops below freezing, it is a good idea to feed a little more hay. The amount of extra hay fed should increase as the temperature drops. Feed about 5% more hay when the temperature is below 32 but above 20 degrees. Feed 10% more hay when the thermometer is between 10-20 degrees. If the temperature drops below 10 degrees, feed 15% more hay.**

**Horses should be fed good-quality (average) or better hay. Hay is in short supply in some areas of the state this winter, and hay quality is lower than normal. In cold weather, the horse owner can feed horses hay that is slightly below average in quality in other words fair-quality hay. Fair-quality hay will have more and larger stems with less leaves. Such hay will produce more body heat, which helps keep the horse warm in cold weather. Pregnant mares, young, growing horses and intense-level performance horses should not be fed fair-quality hay. Horses should never be fed poor-quality hay.**

**There are situations where 10-15 percent extra hay is not available this winter. In these circumstances, what can a horse owner do?**

**One can feed about 2 pounds of whole oats rather than extra hay in addition to any**

regular grain. It is advisable not to feed more than 6 pounds of grain at one feeding. It would be more advantageous to feed extra oats in the evening. Oats are a high fiber grain that will help produce body heat when digested. Whole oats should be fed not crimped oats. Feeding whole oats could help save limited hay supply while providing extra body heat.

**Table I. Amount of Extra Feed as Temperature Drops in Winter**

Temperature, F	Extra Hay, %	Whole Oats, Lbs.
32-20	5%	2
20-10	10%	4
<10	15%	6

If whole oats are not available, one should look for other high fiber feeds such as all-in-one feeds or cubed hays. Some high fiber dairy feeds, that are none medicated and do not contain urea, may be an option for horses under the current low hay supply situation.

Horses prefer warm water in cold weather. Use water from the hot water faucet rather than the cold water faucet in the winter. The water should be warm, not hot.

Horses drink less water in cold weather. Less water intake coupled with feeding coarser hays (as is the case this year) leads to a higher risk of colic. Providing warm water in cold weather will result in horses drinking more water which can aid in preventing impaction colic.

Horses should have a source of trace mineralized salt. Loose salt is better for horses than block salt. If your horses do not consume much, or any salt, add it to their grain at about 1-2 ounces daily. This will encourage them to drink more water also.

When snow is on the ground, closely observe shod horses that are outside. Snow

tends to “ball” up in the shoes making it difficult for the horse to move normally. It is like they are on ice skates. It is better that horses are unshod, or barefooted in winter, if there is risk of snow.

Horse owners can help their horse stay warmer and more comfortable in extremely cold weather by providing some type of shelter, extra hay or other high fiber feeds and warm water when temperature drops.

# # #

2/03