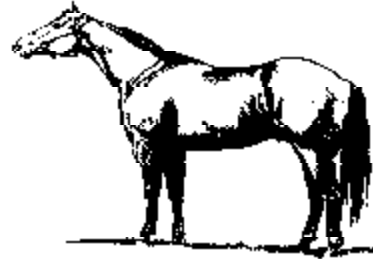


Animal Science Horse Information Series

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CARE FOR OLDER PERFORMANCE HORSES IN SUMMER

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As summer temperatures soar, you may be checking on older relatives and neighbors to make sure they are okay.

But do not forget about older horses. Approximately 20 percent of the United State's horse population is over 20 years of age. And a number of these senior equine citizens perform in summer.

What special precautions do you need to follow for older performance horses?

As with all performance horses, being fat is not good. Older horses are often overfed. Some owners think fat horses are well-managed horses. Wrong!

A body condition score (BCS) of 6 is probably okay for those ridden as pleasure and trail horses. But a 5 to 5.5 is best for horses doing more strenuous performance, especially in

heat and high humidity.

But do not let them get below a BCS of 5 either. Often older horses have difficulty gaining weight. If the intensity of performance is such that they lose weight, they may have a difficult time regaining it, especially in hot weather.

Performance produces internal body heat that the horse must get rid of which is more difficult in fatter horses. Older horses may have more difficulty in regulating their body temperature in hot, humid conditions.

It is important to feed older performance horses a cool ration too. Hay and oats produce considerable internal body heat when they are digested.

Corn is a cooler feed but do not feed more than 23 percent in the concentrate ration. If hay is fed, use one with fine stems and lots of leaves. Hay can be limited to one pound per 100 pounds of body weight. But it is advisable not to feed less than this amount.

Feeding fat to horses results in them eating less feed which is good in summer. In addition to providing extra energy for performance, fat does not produce as much body heat as other feeds. It takes about 30 days for horses to adjust to added fat in their diet. But some older horses could get diarrhea if fed too much fat too soon. Diarrhea is not good for older horses.

Start by adding a 1/2 cup of corn oil once a day to the feed of older horses. Observe how they respond to the added oil for a few days. Then increase the amount of oil after a few days if the horse likes it and eats all its grain. About 3-4 percent added fat may be adequate for most older horses.

Adding 6-7 percent extra fat to the rations of older horses doing strenuous performance may be beneficial, if there is no problem with them consuming this level of fat.

Warming-up and cooling-down are recommended for human athletes. These practices have been proved to be important in horses too. And may even be more important in older equine athletes.

A horse may be cooled-down by walking until its cardiovascular system returns to normal. During the cooling-down process, horses can drink as long as they are kept walking.

It may be advisable to spray cool water over the body of older horses if they are extremely hot, especially in hot, humid weather. It is important that older horses do not get too hot in summer.

They need to have a cool, shady place to get out of the hot summer sun when on pasture.

Make sure they have clean, fresh water to drink after cooling-down and a loose form of trace mineralized salt.

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