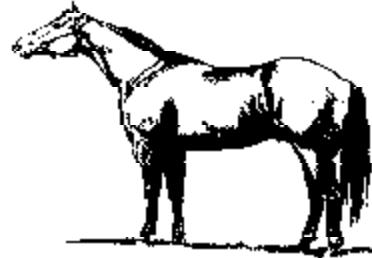


Extension Animal Science Horse Information Series

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IS YOUR HORSE READY FOR WINTER?

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Fall leaf color's signal that "old-man winter" is just around the corner. And, it is time to make sure that your horse is ready for winter.

While the weather is still nice, check your horse's winter housing. If your horse will have access to a run-in shed, it should be cleaned out now. Remove old bedding and manure, and re-bed the shed with 4-8 inches of fresh bedding.

Check the drainage to be sure that water will not run into the shed.

Make sure there are no loose boards or nails in the shed. Horses are active and prone to injuries. The run-in shed also should be adequate for the number of horses, allow at least 80 square feet per horse.

If you plan to put your horse in a stall if the weather gets bad, clean it out and make necessary repairs to remove any risks.

After the horse's housing is in tip-top shape, check your horse, which should also be in tip-top condition before winter.

The horse should have an adequate amount of body fat to insulate against winter's cold wind, rain and snow. You can use a visual-hands-on system to evaluate body condition. Body condition score (BCS) your horse from 1 (emaciated) to 9 (very fat) before winter. Your horse should have at least a BCS of 5, which means you cannot see the ribs but can feel them if you run your fingers over the rib cage applying slight pressure.

Horses add body fat from front to rear and top to bottom. Evaluate their necks, withers, covering over their rib cages and croups, and around their tailheads for deposition of fat.

It is really important that you feel your horses in winter due to their heavier winter haircoat. Often, one cannot accurately evaluate a horse's body condition by only visual appraisal. It is important to body condition score your horse each month in winter.

If your horse is less than a 5 body condition score, you need to increase its energy intake to improve body condition. You can increase a horse's BCS by a point, from 4.5-5.5, in 30 days by feeding more grain and hay. If your winters are colder, you may want to increase your horse's body condition score to a 6 to 7. There is no need for it to be an 8 or 9.

But, body condition is not the only consideration. Your horse also should be on a scheduled deworming program. Horses need to be dewormed every other month with ivermectin, every 90 days with moxidectin or every month with other dewormers.

Although you probably vaccinated your horse in the spring, make sure it has been immunized against tetanus. Horses often get undetected cuts in the winter that are an ideal environment for the tetanus microorganism.

Now is a good time to have your horse's teeth checked. It is advisable to remove sharp points on molars before feeding winter hay.

It is advisable to remove your horse's shoes if it will not be ridden in the winter. Loose shoes can cause serious injuries. Make sure the horse's hooves are properly trimmed. And do not forget to have them trimmed periodically during winter.

Do not turn horses out, even for a short time, with a halter on either. Injuries happen all too often when a horse catches a halter on a fence post or tree limb.

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