



PREPARING YOUR HORSE FOR WINTER

As the colder weather approaches us, it is important that we start to take into account that our horses will require a little more attention and special care. We need to look at precautions and actions that will enable them to adjust from the warmer days with longer light periods to the colder and shorter sunny days.

Horses that are kept in a paddock all the time will adjust accordingly to the changes in season by growing a longer coat to horses that are stabled and correctly rugged. As an owner, we need to be able to provide adequate shelter and nutrition throughout the year, especially winter as this is when horses will need it the most to protect themselves from wind, rain, frosts, extremely low temperatures and sometimes even snow in those colder parts of Australia. Access to covered shelter should be available at all times. Rugging horses helps to protect them from the colder elements however may not always be needed in some cases if the horse has been allowed to grow a full winter coat.

When rugging, avoid fitting rugs that are too tight or too heavy as this can have a negative effect on horses with a heavy coat. This can actually prevent the horses coat from rising thus decreasing the natural insulating effect that occurs when a horses coat raises to keep itself warm. For horses that are still competing during the winter months it is important to maintain a short coat so that the horse remains comfortable and does not excessively sweat. The amount of daylight, as mentioned earlier, will have a direct effect on a horse's cycle of hair growth. Lighting programs can aid in maintaining a short, shiny coat, with periods that offer up to 16 hours of light per day, to be commenced in early autumn.

Water and feeding are two areas that need to be addressed when heading into winter. Water temperatures tend to be reduced thus reducing a horse's fluid intake. Lack of drinking can lead to such problems as colic. Changing the water to prevent it from freezing or icing over, using automatic waterers, using water heating devices or providing electrolytes and salt blokes either in your horses feed or on there own are all ways of assuring that your horses water consumption will remain at a sufficient level.

Since a horse's nutrient demands and requirements will also change in the colder temperatures, feeding practices may need to be adjusted to manage body condition and any changes that may take place. Your horse should continue to be fed according to body condition all year round. Digestion of hay provides internal heat; therefore an increase in roughage may assist to keep your horse warmer. Only if your horse is being ridden less do may you need to consider reducing there concentrated feed intake.

Regular hoof care and maintenance still needs to be carried out during the winter months, even though the winter months may see hoof growth slow down slightly. Longer warm up and cool down when riding is also an important factor when exercising in the colder weather so that you do not put excessive strain on your horse's muscles, to avoid soft tissue injuries.

Also, remember that your older or geriatric horses that may not be in work may also not be fed concentrated feeds at high levels as your younger or fitter horses. They require that extra bit more attention as they can be more sensitive to extreme temperature changes and may suffer from arthritic joints. Veterinarian consultation can aid in assisting your much loved friend or you can provide them with higher fat, more digestible diets as this can help to provide extra warmth and maintain weight.

So, to ensure your horse is at it's most comfortable and happiest during winter, always make sure that they have good shelter from wind, rain and snow. Regularly check water sources,

monitor water intake and feed plenty of good quality hay so that your horse stays at its optimal health.

For further grooming and care advice for your most treasured friend, please refer to "Grooming The Professional Way". Here you will find tips and general horse management practices. Web link is http://www.h-10.com.au/_h10v2/whatsnew.asp

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