

Why grazing horses can still need horse feed

Healthy **pasture grazing** is the basis of many horses' diets, but it does not always meet every need. Grass provides **roughage**, water, natural fibre and some calories, yet **horse nutrition** is about far more than simply satisfying the stomach. A horse may still need extra **horse feed** if the grass is sparse, very lush but low in certain nutrients, or insufficient to meet **calorie requirements** for the horse's age, size or work.

This forage-first method is often the best place to begin. This means prioritising grass, **hay** or **haylage** before including hard feed. But, forage alone may not supply enough **protein, vitamins and minerals**, or calories for horses with higher needs. It may also not be enough for horses that need support for **weight management**, condition, or **performance**.

The real question is not if a horse is grazing, but whether that grazing is enough. A horse in easy work may do very well with limited extra feed, while another horse with a higher **workload** or faster **metabolism** may need a well-chosen ration. The aim is **diet balance**: enough forage for **digestive health** and **gut health**, plus the appropriate top-up feed where needed.

View horse feeding as a three step check:

- How much forage the horse is really receiving.
- Whether the horse is holding **body condition score**.
- Whether energy, minerals and fibre are adequate for the horse's lifestyle.

Types of horse feed to consider

There are many **types of horse feed**, and the best choice depends on what the grazing is missing. Common options include **nuts, mixes**, fibre-based feeds, and compound feeds designed to substitute for part or all of the ration. The most suitable **horse feed** is the one that helps preserve the horse's condition without disrupting the diet.

Nuts are often a easy, tidy option and can be useful for horses that need a controlled ration. **Mixes** usually contain a mixture of ingredients and may be chosen for palatability, extra calories, or convenience. Some feeds are higher in starch, while others are built around fibre and oil to give **slow release energy**.

When comparing feed, look beyond the marketing name. Check the feed label for the energy level, starch, fibre content, protein, and added minerals. The goal is to match the feed to the forage base and the horse's needs, not simply to pick the most popular bag on the shelf.

Complete horse feed vs straights and balancers

A **complete horse feed** is designed to deliver a broad range of nutrients in [Get more info](#) one product, though the horse still needs access to forage. This can be a convenient choice for owners who want simplicity and a clear ration. A **balancer** is different: it is a concentrated feed used in small amounts to supply **vitamins and minerals**, and sometimes amino acids, without adding many calories.

Straights are individual ingredients such as oats, beet pulp, or barley. They can be useful, but they require more knowledge to maintain **diet balance**. If you mix straights without planning, it is easy to underfeed key nutrients or push starch too high.

For grazing horses, a balancer can work well when the horse gets plenty of grass or forage but needs nutritional coverage. A complete feed may suit horses that need a more substantial ration in fewer meals. Straights can be appropriate for experienced owners who understand how to build a balanced **ration**.

When a chaff or fibre feed helps

Chaff and **fibre feed** products are often very useful alongside grazing. They lengthen the chewing time, support **digestive health**, and can support keeping the horse satisfied between meals. Fibre-based products are also a useful way to add volume without overdoing starch.

Many fibre feeds are helpful for horses needing **slow release energy**, especially those that become sharp on cereal-heavy rations. Adding chaff can also improve **palatability** and make a smaller feed feel more substantial. For horses with a sensitive stomach, fibre-led feeding often supports **gut health** more successfully than large amounts of hard feed.

Chaff is not a complete answer on its own, but it can be a smart part of the overall diet. Used well, it helps distribute the feed, reduce intake, and support a forage-based approach.

Horse feeding rules to follow when grazing

There are a number of practical **horse feeding rules** that help maintain grazing horses healthy. These are often the same guidelines taught in the **10 rules of feeding horses**, even if different yard managers word them slightly differently. The key idea is routine, forage-first feeding, and avoiding sudden changes that upset **gut health**.

Initially, make forage the base of the diet. Even when grass is available, horses often do better with added hay or haylage if pasture intake is uncertain. Next, feed little and often rather than giving large meals. Finally, introduce any new feed gradually so the digestive system can adapt.

A strong **feeding routine** matters as much as the feed itself. Horses thrive on predictable mealtimes and steady access to forage where possible. Avoid long gaps without fibre, especially for horses that are stabled for part of the day. Consistency supports digestive comfort, stable energy, and better weight control.

Good rules also include checking body condition regularly, adjusting to the seasons, and avoiding overreliance on treats or concentrates. A horse fed from a clear routine is easier to manage and less likely to experience diet-related problems.

How much to feed and meal timing

Portion size should be based on the horse, not a fixed scoop measure. The amount needed depends on **workload**, grass availability, body size, and the horse's current **body condition score**. A horse in light work may only need a balancer or fibre feed, while a horse in harder work may need a larger, more energy-dense ration.

Feeding frequency is important too. Smaller, more frequent meals are usually better for digestion than large buckets of feed. This helps support **gut health** and reduces the risk of digestive upset. For many horses, two or three small hard-feed meals a day is more suitable than one large one.

When a horse is losing condition, boosting feed should be gradual and based on the actual problem. If the horse has too much weight, the answer may be to cut back on concentrates, increase exercise where appropriate, and review forage quality rather than simply cutting everything back.

How to use a horse feeding chart

A **horse feeding chart** turns general advice into a usable feed plan. It is especially useful when comparing grazing, hay, haylage, hard feed, and supplements. A good chart is a straightforward planning aid, not a strict manual. The best charts work alongside a **horse feed calculator uk** tool or a feed company guide, plus your own observations of the horse.

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Start with **condition scoring**. This means judging the horse's shape, fat cover, and muscle to estimate whether the current diet is right. Then factor in **weight**, workload, age, and the amount of forage the horse gets each day. The chart should help you answer: is the horse getting enough to hold, gain, or reduce condition?

Feed charts are most helpful when updated regularly. As grazing changes with the seasons, so should the ration. A horse that stays in good condition on summer grass may need more support when pasture quality drops or when hay replaces turnout.

What a basic grazing plus feed chart should show

A basic grazing-plus-feed chart should show estimated **forage intake**, any **hard feed**, and the amount of **mineral intake** provided by a balancer or supplement. It should also reflect the purpose of the ration, such as maintenance, condition gain, or performance support.

Good **ration planning** means listing the forage base first, then adding only the feed needed to fill the gap. This keeps the diet simple and reduces the chance of overlap or deficiency. If the horse gets plenty of good grass, a small amount of balancer may be enough. If the forage is limited or the horse is working harder, the chart may need to include nuts, mixes, or a complete feed.

The chart should also help with practical checks: is the horse bright, settled, and maintaining condition? If the answer is yes, the ration may already be close to right.

How to choose feed for various horses

For **horse feed for beginners**, the best advice is often to stick to the basics. Begin with the horse's **age**, **work level**, and **metabolism**. A young or maturing horse, a senior horse, and a horse in active training all have varied needs, even if they all have access to grazing.

Age affects how efficiently a horse uses feed. Younger horses may need support for growth, while older horses may need more digestible fibre and better nutrient density. Work level changes the calorie requirement, and metabolism affects how easily the horse holds or loses weight. Some horses stay round on very little, while others need more concentrated support just to maintain condition.

Always ask whether the feed is filling a genuine gap. If the horse has good grass, calm behaviour, and stable condition, a balancer or fibre-based option may be enough. If the horse is lacking topline, dropping weight, or needing better recovery, a more substantial feed may be needed.

Easy keepers, poor doers and performance horses

An **easy keeper** usually does better on forage, a low-calorie balancer, and careful control of extra energy. Too much hard feed can quickly cause unwanted weight gain and may increase the risk of metabolic issues. For these horses, body condition is the main guide.

A **poor doer** may need more calories, higher fibre, and feeds that support steady intake without excessive starch. A fibre-led ration with oil or digestible energy sources is often more useful than a sugary or cereal-heavy mix. Monitor **body condition** closely and adjust gradually.

A **performance horse** usually needs more targeted support for recovery, stamina, and muscle function. That may mean a complete feed, a performance nut, or a balanced mix designed for higher **workload**. In this group, feed choice should support energy delivery without making the horse fizzy or uncomfortable.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost changes depending on the product type, daily feeding rate, and the size of the horse's ration. A bag that looks pricey may actually offer good **value for money** if the daily amount is small. Likewise, a less expensive product can become costly if the horse needs large quantities to meet its needs.

When planning a **feed budget**, plan in daily cost rather than bag price. Include the cost of balancers, chaff, mixes, nuts, and any supplements that are genuinely needed. The best budget is one that keeps the horse healthy while reducing waste.

It also helps to remember that the lowest-priced option is not always the most economical. If a feed does not suit the horse, you may end up buying extras to patch the ration. A well-matched feed often reduces money over time.

Comparing horse feed companies and product types

Different **horse feed companies** provide different philosophies, ingredient profiles, and feeding rates, so **brand comparison** matters. One company may focus on fibre-based feeds, while another may have a broader range of energy-dense mixes or specialist balancers. The right choice depends on your horse's needs and your confidence in reading the **feed label**.

When comparing products, look at **cost per day**, not just the retail price. Also check whether the feed is suitable for the horse's age, workload, and condition. A feed may be popular, but if it is too rich, too low in fibre, or not palatable enough for your horse, it is not the right choice.

Smart comparison leads to better ration planning and fewer trial-and-error purchases.

Well-known horse feed labels and options

Many owners ask for a known name such as **spillers horse feed** because a well-known **brand range** can make choosing feel easier. A brand's reputation can help, but the most important factor is **feed suitability**. A feed that suits one horse may be entirely wrong for another.

Look for reliable **horse feed advice uk** based on the horse's condition, grass intake, and workload. A diverse brand range can be useful because it may include a balancer, a complete feed, fibre options, and performance products, allowing you to tailor the ration more precisely.

Use brand names as a guide, not the final decision. Check the nutrition analysis and match the feed to the horse in front of you.

Is it possible to make a horse feed mix recipe?

A **horse feed mix recipe** can be made at home, but **homemade feed** needs proper planning. The appeal is obvious: you choose the **ingredients**, control the texture, and can sometimes tailor the ration to the horse. However, the challenge is ensuring **nutrient balance**.

Basic mixes may include fibre sources, oil, and a base ingredient, but they still need the right mineral coverage and enough protein and energy for the horse. Without that, a homemade ration can become unbalanced very quickly. This is especially important if the horse is in work, growing, older, or prone to weight issues.

If you want to create your own mix, keep it conservative and seek professional guidance. In many cases, a well-formulated commercial feed is safer and easier than building a ration from scratch. Homemade feeding can work, but only when the nutrition is properly understood.

Short quiz: what should I offer my horse?

Use this easy decision guide to help with **feed selection**. It should not replace tailored advice, but it can help you align the feed to the horse profile and **feeding needs**.

- **Is grazing plentiful and the horse maintaining weight?** A nutrient balancer or small fiber feed may be enough.
- **Is the horse dropping weight?** Choose more digestible fibre, extra calories, or a complete horse feed.
- **Is the horse carrying too much weight?** Cut back on calorie-dense feed and prioritise forage quality and controlled portions.
- **Is the horse in more demanding work?** Choose a ration that supports energy, recovery, and performance without too much starch.
- **Does the horse need better topline or minerals?** A balancer may be the best first step.

As a general rule, begin with forage, review condition, then add the minimum feed needed to fill the gap. That is the simplest way to keep the ration purposeful and horse-led.

Feeding mistakes to avoid

A major mistake is **overfeeding**. Extra is not always better, especially if the horse already has good grazing. Extra calories can lead to unwanted weight gain and may contribute to metabolic stress. Another frequent problem is ignoring **laminitis** risk in horses prone to weight gain or sugar sensitivity.

Colic risk can increase when feeding is inconsistent, forage is too limited, or the ration changes too quickly. A **sudden diet change** can disrupt the hindgut and upset digestion. Always introduce feed gradually and keep the overall routine steady.

A final mistake is choosing feed based only on price, trend, or label claims. The correct horse feed is the one that fits the horse's grazing, condition, workload and digestibility needs. If you stay forage-first, monitor body condition, and adjust slowly, you are much more likely to get the balance right.

FAQ

Do horses need hard feed if they have good grazing?

Not always. If the grazing is decent and the horse is holding a healthy body condition score, hard feed may not be necessary. Some horses only need roughage and perhaps a balancer to provide vitamins and minerals. Others, especially under training or with higher energy requirements, may still need horse feed alongside grazing.

What is the best horse feed to use with grazing?

The best horse feed depends on the horse's needs. For many grazing horses, a balancer or fibre feed is a sensible starting point. If the horse needs more calories, a complete horse feed, nuts, or a thoughtful mix may be better. The key is choosing feed that supports diet balance without adding unnecessary starch.

How much horse feed should I give alongside grass?

Give only enough to fill the nutritional gap left by the grass. Portion size depends on workload, weight, body condition score, and whether the horse is staying at, adding, or losing condition. Feed frequency should usually be little and often rather than one large meal.

Is a complete horse feed better than mixing my own ration?

For many owners, yes, because a complete horse feed is easier to balance and reduces the risk of mistakes. Mixing your own ration with straights can work, but it requires more knowledge to maintain nutrient balance. If you are unsure, a complete feed or balancer is often the better choice.

How do I know if my horse needs more or less feed?

Check body condition, behaviour, weight, and how the horse looks in work. If condition is dropping or the horse seems tired, it may need more energy or better-quality forage support. If it is gaining excess weight, reduce calorie-dense feed and review the ration. Condition scoring is one of the clearest ways to inform feed changes.