

Horsing around: Winter Care

By Birgit Stutz



Birgit Stutz

tain heat better if you increase his hay, giving him all the hay he can eat, rather than increasing his grain. Mature horses in good condition usually don't need grain if they have good winter pasture or grass hay. Young horses, geriatric horses, broodmares and horses in poor condition may need alfalfa hay along with their pasture or grass hay to provide the extra nutrition they need. Grain, beet pulp, alfalfa pellets or alfalfa cubes are other options. Vegetable oil and rice bran are two easy ways to provide calories without significant extra bulk.

Feed at least twice a day and make sure the larger feeding is given in the evening as nights are colder and longer.

Check all hay for mould and dust. With the short winter days, it is often dark at feeding time and difficult to check the quality of the hay. It is a good idea to open your bales in the daylight to know exactly what you are feeding and sort your hay when you can see it.

Don't forget to check your horse's body condition periodically, using your fingers along his neck, withers, ribs, and hips to determine how much flesh is under all that hair.

Fresh water is important to horses all year, especially in winter. Make sure your horse has good access to water and is drinking. This can be difficult to monitor if your horse lives in a herd. If water is ice-cold, horses will drink less. A horse that isn't drinking enough will eat less and may lose weight or be less able to keep warm.

It is true that horses will eat snow. A horse at pasture may manage fine if the snow isn't hard and crusted, but there is always some risk of impaction. As well, it takes a lot of snow to make up for a horse's water consumption, not to mention the extra energy required to melt it. If you are feeding your horse hay, access to water is vital in order to avoid impaction and the possible risk of colic. On average, a horse needs 20-30 litres of water a day.

If your horse's manure becomes firm and dry instead of soft and moist, the horse is not getting enough water. If your horse looks gaunt and his flanks and abdomen are tucked up, chances are he is dehydrated.

The easiest way to make water accessible to your horse – provided there is power nearby – is by installing a de-icer in the water trough. There are several kinds on the market, both floating and drain-plug de-icers. I have used both types and prefer the drain-plug de-icers as they heat the stock tank from the bottom up and therefore keep the water ice-free even in the coldest temperatures. I have found that the floating de-icers cannot keep up in really cold weather and some ice forms at the opposite end of the de-icer. Another concern I have with floating de-icers is that the cord is exposed and some horses may play with it.

Some people insulate their stock tanks all around and put a lid on top, except for a hole big enough for the horse to

stick his head through. A great way to reduce your power bill! If you use an automatic waterer, check it periodically to make sure it is working properly.

If you don't have a power source nearby, consider purchasing a solar waterer.

If you water your horse by carrying pails of water out to him, do so at least twice a day. Horses drink most of their daily water within three hours after being fed, and they tend to drink more during the warmer daylight hours.

If your horse's water source is a stream or pond, check the water twice daily to break ice if necessary. Some horses may be hesitant to step on ice to reach a water hole you've chopped, so consider spreading sand on the ice to give them safer footing.

If your horse is kept outside year-round, it is a good idea to have his shoes pulled and his feet trimmed by a professional farrier before there's snow on the ground and snow balls up under your horse's feet. Horses need to remain on a consistent farrier schedule throughout the winter to ensure healthy feet.

Horses should be dewormed at least twice a year, preferably more often. If you only deworm twice a year, it is a good idea to wait until the ground freezes. Check with your veterinarian for the appropriate type of dewormer.

Birgit Stutz is a Chris Irwin Silver Certified Trainer and Coach and has been involved with horses for a quarter century. She owns and operates Falling Star Ranch in Dunster together with her husband. Birgit welcomes any questions.

With colder temperatures and shorter days, it is time to think about your horse's needs during the winter months of the year.

Make sure you have adequate good-quality hay for the winter. Running out of hay at the end of winter can be very costly as hay is not always readily available and may need to be shipped in from outside the area.

In cold weather, horses need more calories to maintain body heat. Temperature, wind chill, moisture and coat thickness play a role in energy requirements. Thick coats insulate horses against cold and wind, however, if the coat becomes wet, even more energy is required.

Feeds vary in the amount of internal heat produced when digested by horses. Hay produces more internal body heat than grain, therefore a horse can main-

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BC Hydro is seeking a wide range of representatives including First Nations, government agencies, non profit organizations, business, property owners and local residents to join an Advisory Committee.

The role of the Advisory Committee will be to recommend social and environmental measures to address the installation of both generating units. It is anticipated that Advisory Committee members will participate in approximately six meetings over the next year. The first meeting is scheduled for December 3 and 4, 2007. In addition, technical sub-committee meetings will be scheduled as needed to examine specific topics of interest. The Advisory Committee may also recommend a preferred set of revisions to the Columbia River Water Use Plan.

If you would like be a member of the Advisory Committee, receive regular project updates or obtain more information about the Mica Generating Station Units 5 and 6 Project, please contact:

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