

8 tips for equine winter care

By Tarah Young
CULTIVATING SUCCESS IN THE FARM & GARDEN

As I’m writing this column, on a -7-degree morning, I am hoping you are all prepared for winter. If you have horses, I’ve gathered eight tips to make sure they are just as ready for winter, just as much as you are.

1. Remember the importance of water. Most adult horses need 10 to 12 gallons of water daily.

During the summer months, pastures contain about 80% moisture and can contribute to your horse’s water requirement. In contrast, dried hay contains less than 15% moisture, therefore, your horse will require more water in the winter.

To encourage drinking, keep your horse’s water between 45 to 65 degrees, regularly clean waterers, make sure tank heaters are in working condition and check waterers for electrical sensations or shocks.

Remember, snow and ice are not adequate water sources for horses.

2. Monitor feed intake. The lower critical temperature is the temperature below which a horse needs additional energy to maintain body warmth. The lower critical temperature estimate for horses is 41 degrees with a summer coat and 18 degrees with a winter coat; however, younger horses may reach their lower critical temperature before a mature horse.

For every degree below 18 degrees, the horse requires an additional 1% energy in their diet to help maintain body temperature and condition.

The best source of additional dietary energy is forages, since they are fermented by microbes which produce heat that keeps the horse warm. Other nutrient requirements



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Water, feed, shelter, blanketing, exercise, hoof care and a proper paddock are key to healthy horses during the winter months.

don’t change during cold weather.

3. Track body condition and bodyweight. During winter months, heavy hair coats can hide weight loss or gain. Body condition and weight should be assessed monthly to help track horse health and any purposeful or accidental changes in body condition and weight.

Body weight can be tracked using weight tapes, the Healthy Horse mobile app or mathematical equations that use various body measurements.

4. Blanketing. Blanketing a horse is necessary to reduce the effects of cold or inclement weather when no shelter is available during turnout periods and the temperatures

or wind chill drop below 5 degrees, there is a chance the horse will become wet, the horse has had its winter coat clipped, the horse is very young or very old, the horse isn’t acclimated to the cold, and/or the horse has a body condition score of three or less.

Make sure blankets fit, as poorly fitted blankets can cause sores and rub marks. Remove the blanket daily, inspect it for damage, reposition it and make sure it stays dry.

5. Provide shelter. Horses should have access to shelter. In the absence of wind and moisture, most horses tolerate temperatures at or slightly below 0 degrees. If horses have access to a shelter, they can tolerate temperatures as low

as -40 degrees. Researchers found that in mild winter weather, horses housed outdoors tended to use shelter very little. However, shelter usage increased to 62% when snowing and wind speed were greater than 11 miles per hour.

6. Provide exercise. Provide your horse with turnout or exercise as often as possible. One of the challenges with winter riding is cooling down a horse with a winter coat. Using a trace clip on regularly exercised horses can help speed the cooling process. However, clipped hair won’t grow back rapidly in the winter; therefore, use appropriate shelter and blankets throughout the winter and into the early spring months. Using a cooler can also aid in drying a sweaty

horse. Take caution when riding in deep, heavy or wet snow to prevent tendon injuries and avoid icy areas.

7. Maintain regular hoof care.

Horse hooves generally grow slower in the winter, however, trimming should still occur every six to 12 weeks.

Horse hooves are prone to “ice or snowballs” during the winter. These balls of packed ice or snow make it hard for the horse to walk, increase the chance of slipping and falling and may put stress on tendons or joints.

Make sure to pick your horse’s hooves daily, especially after a heavy snow.

8. Keep paddocks in working order.

Icy paddocks cause slips and falls that can lead to serious injury. Use sand to increase traction on ice, but don’t feed horses near spread sand, as they may accidentally ingest it.

Straight salt can speed the melting of ice if temperatures aren’t too cold. No research has documented the effect of salt on horse hooves, but to be safe, use pure salt in moderation.

Don’t use a mixture of sand and salt in horse paddocks since horses may accidentally ingest the sand via their interest in the salt. Additionally, spreading a thin layer of wood ash or fresh manure can help improve traction. Avoid using shavings, hay and straw as they tend to slide over ice and provide little traction.

Tarah Young is an interim Hubbard County University of Minnesota Extension educator in agriculture, food and natural resources. If you have any questions about this topic or any others, contact her at 732-3391. If information about agriculture, gardening and natural resources interests you, consider signing up for the Hubbard County UMN Extension Agriculture, Gardening and Natural Resources E-newsletter at z.umn.edu/HCEExtensionNewsletter.

Help little tadpoles through role modeling

With “ice in” dates being logged on area lakes, fishing families are now preparing for the ice fishing season.

Area lakes will soon host family gatherings around the fishing shelters scattered about on the ice. All ages of fishing enthusiasts can be spotted on the ice, especially on the weekends, from tadpoles learning to fish alongside older siblings, parents and grandparents. All appreciating the ice that covers the healthy waters supporting the variety of fish, potential meals and/or photos for the catch-and-release family commandery.

While planning your family fishing adventures, think perhaps of building your tadpole’s tackle box with



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lead-free tackle.

Using lead-free tackle is a personal commitment to wildlife. You have an opportunity to model excellent behavior and provide educational information, too.

As the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s fact sheet explains for the “Get The Lead Out” program, lead is toxic to wildlife. Even in small amounts, it is lethal to loons, eagles and trumpeter swans.

It is estimated that lead is responsible for up to 25% of loon deaths.

No one wants to lose tackle, but it happens. Using lead-free tackle helps reduce the risk to our common loons when they return next springtime.

Each of our local bait shops do carry lead-free tackle. Just ask for help to locate it.

Non-toxic alternatives are tungsten (especially popular for winter ice fishing as it is heavier than lead), bismuth, steel, tin, glass, stone and metal composite.

Make your family fishing adventures safe for not only your tadpoles, but for wildlife, too! To learn more, see <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/file/minnesota-get-lead-out>.

Members of the Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations write a monthly column in the Enterprise addressing water issues in the region.

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