



Basic Horse Care

Owning a horse is a big responsibility and a commitment of time, energy, finances and resources. AND, it can be an extremely rewarding and exciting experience when it's all done well. The following points outline basic requirements for owning and caring for an adult horse. You can use this checklist to review your current horse management program or to assist you in determining if you are ready to take on horse ownership. ***Keep in mind that you should always consult your veterinarian on the health care program best for your horses or if you have problems or questions.***

Basic Care

□ **Strong, tight fencing** - Barbed wire or field fencing should not be used with horses, especially for confinement areas or small paddocks. Whatever fencing you choose, reinforce it with a strand of hot wire along the inside (chest height on the horse). This will provide a psychological barrier for the horse that they are likely to respect. Any type of wire should be tight and frequently checked for loosening. Walk your fence lines regularly and inspect them for problems such as loose rails or protruding nails.

□ **Shelter** - A horse needs shelter and protection from the heat, driving rain and severe cold. During the winter months, horses should have a place where they can be out of the mud and wet areas for at least half the day. A three-sided shed (closed on the side of prevailing winds) with a large paddock is excellent and may be the most natural for a horse. Stall size for an adult horse should be 12'x12', and 10'x10' for a small horse or pony. Flooring should be dry and level - rubber mats on top of 6 inches of gravel are excellent and reduce the amount of shavings needed.

□ **Clean pastures** - Inspect your pastures regularly to make sure there are no sharp objects that can hurt horses. Equipment and other implements should not be stored in horse areas. Watering and feeding containers should be free of rusty edges and sharp corners. Be sure your pastures are free of poisonous plants. Contact your local conservation district for more information on pasture management and toxic plants.

□ **A clean, dry place to eat** - The preferable location for a horse to be fed is in a clean, well-ventilated stall or shelter. It is most natural for a horse to eat with its head lowered -- this helps clear their respiratory system. Never feed in mud; feeding on sand or muddy ground leads to ingestion of dirt and serious digestion problems. Good feeding options for hay and grain include flat, open grain pans or boxes, rubber mats, upside down carpet, or firm, dry sod.

□ **Pasture/manure management** - Maintaining healthy pastures and planning for regular manure disposal are important aspects of horse care. A 1,000 lb. horse produces about 50 lbs. of manure per day, equaling about 1 cubic foot per day. With bedding that comes to 2 cubic feet per day of waste. You can utilize the manure as compost in pastures, gardens or lawns, or arrange to haul it away.

Most pastures can't survive overgrazing or constant trampling during the winter, so plan for a heavy use area. Your horses will have dry feet and your pastures can rest. This is the best way to have lush, green, weed-free pastures in the Spring.



□ **Storage area** - A clean, dry and convenient area free of rodents is necessary for storing tack, bedding, feed and simple equipment. Store all grain in rodent-proof metal containers. Be sure to secure this area from the possibility of your horse getting into it.

Nutrition

□ **Feedings** - Alfalfa hay is higher in protein and energy, but for most horses grass hay (such as Orchard grass) or a mix of grass and alfalfa is best. Horses should be supplemented with grain only if the horse cannot maintain its weight on hay alone. A good rule of thumb for feeding hay is 1.5 - 2 lbs. of hay per 100 lbs. of body weight. This would be 15 - 20lbs. of hay for an average 1,000 lb. horse.

Always purchase green, leafy hay free of dust and mold. Separate horses to feed them. This prevents fights, injuries and weight loss problems. Don't overstock your pastures or crowd horses together. Horses should be fed at least twice a day. Consult your veterinarian for the feeding program best suited for your horse.

□ **Water** - A horse drinks 8 to 12 gallons of water per day. Water should be fresh and available at all times. Be sure your horse's water container is free of rough edges and rust. It should be scrubbed clean of algae and dirt regularly. Be especially careful in cold weather that your horse's water is not frozen or too cold or they may not drink an adequate amount.

□ **Selenium supplement** - We live in a selenium-deficient part of the world, therefore selenium should be supplemented to all horses in the Pacific Northwest. Consult your veterinarian on the correct dosage.

□ **Salt block** - White salt should be available free-choice at all times.

Health

□ **Vaccinations** - Consult your veterinarian for their specific recommendations for the vaccination program they recommend for your area. Basic vaccinations are required once or twice a year.

□ **Dental exam** - A horse's teeth are continually erupting so yearly dental exams should be done by a veterinarian.

□ **Hoof care** - Horses need regular hoof care, even for a horse that is not being ridden. A horse should have his feet trimmed by a knowledgeable farrier approximately every 8 weeks. Be sure to regularly clean and inspect your horse's feet.

□ **Deworming** - Paste wormers can be purchased at feed stores or from vet supply catalogs. Your veterinarian may recommend certain types of deworming protocols and rotation schedules. Latest recommendations are for a fecal test to be done, then deworming done based on the test results. Stalls and confinement areas should have manure removed from them every 1 to 3 days to avoid re-exposing your horse to worm larva.

□ **Flies and other insects** - Use a screened fly mask during fly season. Place nest boxes for insect eating birds and bats around your property.

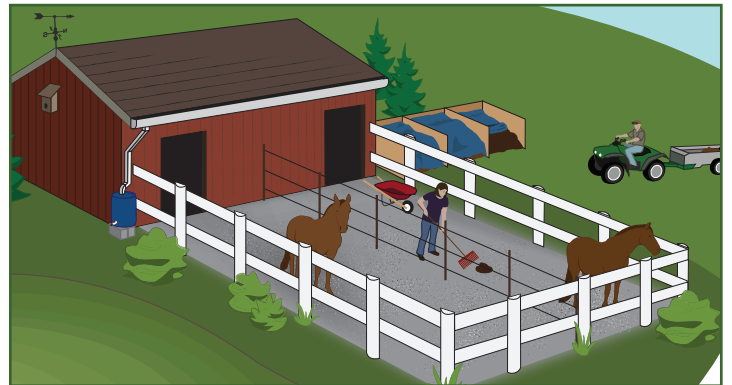
□ **First aid kit** - A well-stocked first aid kit is important to have on hand for emergencies as well as for caring for wounds or scrapes. Have flashlights and headlamps on hand (with extra batteries) in the barn as well as in your horse trailer.

Farm equipment

Equipment does not need to be elaborate or expensive, especially in a small set-up. A manure fork and a barrow are most important and will get you a long way.

Time, energy, finances and resources.

It is important that you realize and are prepared for the extent of commitment horsekeeping requires. If you are a new to owning horses, you might want to take lessons first and offer to work around the stables. This will give you an opportunity to learn more about horses and see firsthand what caring for horses entails.



Questions?

Snohomish Conservation District farm planners can be reached at 425-335-5634 or email soundhorse@snohomishcd.org.

This fact sheet is adapted from an article by Alayne Blickle, Director of Horses for Clean Water. For more information, please visit HorsesforCleanWater.com.