

What supplementary feeding means for horses

Supplemental feeding is the practice of adding **horse feed** into a horse's usual diet when **forage** alone is not enough to satisfy its **nutritional requirements**. The primary forage sources are **hay**, **haylage**, and **pasture**, and these should always make up the core of the **feed ration**. Supplemental feeding is not about substituting for forage; it is about closing <http://www.montananeonline.com/news/story/555500/with-half-of-britains-horses-overweight-bifid-launches-grainfree-lowsugar-feed-for-the-nations-gooddoers.html> the gap between what the horse gets from forage and what it needs for basic upkeep, **conditioning**, work, or recovery.

A lot of horses do well on a **maintenance ration** focused largely on forage, but some need extra **calories**, **protein**, **vitamins and minerals**, or **electrolytes**. This is particularly the case when grass quality drops, grazing is limited, the horse is in heavier **workload**, or the animal struggles to keep weight on. Good supplementary feeding is an aspect of **equine nutrition** management, not a one-size-fits-all routine.

The aim is to support **weight management**, steady energy, and **digestive health**. Horses are designed for a fibre-led diet, so the best plans keep plenty of roughage in place and use horse feed to round out the rest. In practical terms, that means checking forage quality, assessing the horse's body, and making feed choices based on need rather than habit.

Categories of horse feed and when each is best used

You will find several **types of horse feed**, and the right one depends on the horse's age, condition, temperament, and workload. The most common options include **concentrates**, a **balancer**, and **complete feed**. Each serves a different purpose in supplementary feeding.

Concentrates are high-energy feeds designed to add calories, often alongside a forage-based diet. They may suit horses doing extra work, horses needing extra body condition, or those with higher energy demands. Some concentrates provide **slow release energy** with a lower starch profile, which can be useful for horses that become sharp or difficult to manage on cereal-heavy feed.

A **balancer** is typically a nutrient-dense, low-feed-rate option. It is useful when forage is good but the diet may lack enough **essential vitamins and minerals**, amino acids, or **the right mineral balance**. This makes balancers a sensible choice for easy keepers, native types, and horses on restricted hard feed. They support the diet without adding too many calories.

Complete horse feed combines fibre, energy, and nutrients in one product, so it can simplify feeding. It is often used when owners want a single feed that covers more of the horse's needs, especially when forage quality is variable. However, it still needs to be matched to the horse's **exercise load** and body condition. "Complete" does not mean "correct for every horse".

Choosing between these options is easier when you think about function:

- **Choose concentrates** when extra calories or performance support are needed.
- **Feed a balancer** when forage is adequate but the diet may be short on micronutrients.
- **Feed complete horse feed** when you want a more all-in-one feeding approach and the label matches the horse's needs.

Always judge products by the **feeding label**, not just the front-of-bag claims. Look at starch, fibre, protein, and the feeding rate before deciding.

Horse feeding guidelines every horse owner should know

Sound **horse feeding rules** protect the **digestive system**, boost performance, and reduce the risk of frequent problems linked to poor diet design. The **10 rules of feeding horses** can be outlined simply: build the diet on forage, carry out changes gradually, feed according to body condition, keep water available, avoid sudden starch overloads, and review the diet regularly.

A key one of the most important points is managing **starch intake**. High-starch diets can raise the risk of digestive upset, especially if large cereal meals are fed too quickly or without enough fibre. That is why many owners now favour fibre-based horse feed with controlled starch rather than heavy cereal rations. This approach supports **hindgut health** and smoother energy release.

One more essential rule is to protect **digestive health** by keeping forage available through the day where possible. Horses are trickle feeders, and long gaps without fibre can disrupt the gut. Strive for regular meals, consistent routines, and feed changes made over several days or weeks rather than overnight.

Additional key rules include:

- Align the ration to the horse's body condition and workload.
- Do not feed by guesswork; assess the diet and the horse together.
- Confirm that the feed provides suitable **electrolytes** if the horse sweats heavily.
- Rely on forage as the base and horse feed as the supplement.
- Assess **feeding schedule** consistency and portion sizes.
- Switch feed slowly to protect the gut and avoid reduced palatability.

These rules are the backbone of sensible **equine nutrition**. They help owners avoid overfeeding, underfeeding, and unnecessary feeding mistakes.

How to make a feed chart for your horse

A practical **horse feeding chart** helps you see what the horse is eating, why it is being fed, and whether the ration needs changing. Start with a simple feeding review. Note the horse's age, **body condition score**, **workload**, turnout, and forage type. Then lay out what forage and horse feed are being supplied across the day.

A useful chart usually includes the following:

- What and how much of forage, such as hay, haylage, or pasture intake
- Any hard feed, including concentrates, balancer, or complete horse feed
- Rough energy allowance
- Goals for protein, fibre, and mineral balance
- Any electrolyte additions
- Feeding times and any changes made over time

The **body condition score** is especially valuable because it gives a structured way to judge whether the horse is lean, fit, or holding extra fat. A horse in hard work may need more calories, while a horse with a high body condition score may need less energy and more fibre-led support. This is where **weight management** and workload should be considered at the same time.

A well-designed feeding chart also shows whether the ration is **forage-based diet** focused. If the horse gets most of its intake from hay, haylage, or pasture, the hard feed is likely a supplement rather than the main meal.

That is usually more suitable for gut function and long-term management.

Practical tip: if a horse feed changes the body condition score in the wrong direction over a few weeks, the chart should be updated straight away rather than waiting for a major problem to develop.

How many horse feed to give: using a calculator and practical checks

A **horse feed calculator uk** tool can help estimate a starting point, but it should never replace careful observation. Feed calculators use body weight, **weight**, work level, and purpose to estimate a **daily ration**. The result is a starting guide, not a definitive answer. Good **horse feed advice uk** always pairs the calculation with visual checks and hands-on adjustment.

Start by estimating bodyweight as accurately as possible. Then consider whether the horse is in easy work, moderate work, or heavier work. A horse in regular training generally needs more energy than a horse at rest, but the type of energy matters. For many horses, fibre-led calories are preferable to large starch-heavy meals.

Simple checks to confirm the ration is on track:

- Is the horse keeping a steady body condition score?
- Are energy levels suitable for the work asked of the horse?
- Is the coat, top line, and general attitude improving or declining?
- Is the horse eating all parts of the ration willingly?
- Are droppings and behaviour steady?

If the horse is losing condition, the ration may need more calories or better forage quality. If the horse is becoming over-conditioned, cut back on energy-dense feed first and review grazing and total intake. A calculator can support decision-making, but it should be paired with observation, weigh tape checks, and periodic diet review.

Horse feed pricing: what determines the price?

The cost of horse feed differs greatly because products are designed for different uses, ingredient profiles, and feeding rates. When asking **how much does horse feed cost**, it is useful to consider beyond the bag price. The real cost depends on how much you feed each day and what the product delivers in return.

Several things affect the price:

- **Pack size** and whether the feed is sold in smaller quantities
- **Feed standard**, including ingredient sourcing and nutrient density
- Whether the feed is a balancer, concentrate, or complete horse feed
- The feeding rate needed to meet nutritional requirements
- Additional qualities such as controlled starch, high fibre, or targeted vitamin and mineral support

A lower bag price does not always mean better value. A nutrient-dense balancer may cost more per bag but less per day if only a small amount is fed. Likewise, a lower-quality feed may need a higher daily amount to achieve the same result, increasing the true cost of the ration.

When comparing horse feed cost, compare cost per day, not just cost per bag. This is the clearest way to understand value, especially when the horse is on supplementary feeding rather than a full hard-feed programme.

Extra rations for the novices

Horse feed for beginners ought to be basic, safe, and based on consistent patterns. Set out by creating the diet around forage and then add one horse feed that addresses the main gap. For many new owners, that means a balancer or a fibre-based concentrate rather than a highly cereal-heavy ration.

The key to a good **feeding schedule** is regularity. Feed at the same times each day where possible, keep fresh water available, and avoid making several diet changes at once. A **slow introduction** is essential whenever you introduce a new feed. Commence with small amounts, increase gradually, and watch for changes in appetite, droppings, or behaviour.

Beginners should look for feeds with plenty of **digestible fibre**, moderate starch, and clear feeding instructions. Fibre helps support the digestive system and can improve palatability without overwhelming the [overweight horse feed](#) gut. If the horse is already healthy and holding condition well, a balancer may be enough. If the horse needs more condition or performance support, a suitable concentrate may be better.

New owners should avoid “more is better” thinking. Supplementary feeding should be purposeful. If in doubt, use feed label instructions as a starting point and ask for structured horse feed advice from an experienced nutritionist, vet, or qualified equine professional.

Popular brands and horse feed companies

There are numerous **horse feed companies**, and each offers products in a little different ways. For that reason **brand comparison** should concentrate on the feed’s nutrient profile rather than marketing language. A familiar example is **spillers horse feed**, but the same approach applies to all major brands: compare the feed label, intended use, and actual feeding rate.

When comparing brands, check:

- Starch level and fibre content
- Protein quality and total nutrient density
- The vitamin and mineral coverage
- Whether the feed suits the horse’s workload and condition
- Feeding rate and real-world palatability

Feed labels are important here. They tell you what is really in the bag and how the feed should be used. Look for guidance on the intended horse type, recommended daily amount, and whether it is meant as a complete horse feed, a balancer, or a concentrate. The best brand for one horse may be entirely wrong for another, so match the product to the job.

Basic horse feed mix recipe ideas

A sensible **horse feed mix recipe** does not need to be complicated. The aim is to combine ingredients that support fibre intake, stable energy, and good nutrient coverage. **Mixing feeds** can help customise the ration, but it should be done carefully so the overall balance still makes sense.

A very simple approach might include a fibre-based base, a small amount of energy feed, and a balancer if the diet needs added nutrients. Some owners use **oats** for quick energy, but oats should be fed thoughtfully because they can raise starch intake. They may suit some horses in work, but they are not automatically the right answer for every horse.

Molasses is sometimes used to improve palatability and reduce dust, but it also adds sugar. That means it should be used sparingly, especially for horses needing careful weight management or controlled starch intake. If a horse is picky, improving the quality of forage or using a more palatable commercial feed is often a better long-term solution than relying on added molasses.

Recipe ideas should always start with the horse's need:

- **Forage-led maintenance:** hay or haylage with a balancer
- **Condition support:** forage and a low-starch concentrate
- **Work support:** forage plus a performance feed with controlled starch and added electrolytes

Any prepared mixture should still provide the right mineral balance. If it does not, it may seem practical but fail to meet nutritional requirements.

Signs that your horse needs feed changes

Feed plans should change as the horse changes. Common signs include **weight loss**, reduced **energy levels**, poor coat condition, declining topline, or alterations in appetite. These can indicate that the current horse feed is no longer matching the horse's workload, forage supply, or nutritional needs.

Changes in **faecal consistency** can also be useful clues. Droppings that become very loose, too dry, or unusually inconsistent may suggest a diet issue, a forage problem, or a digestive upset. Because the digestive system is sensitive, changes should not be ignored.

If the horse seems dull, loses condition, or becomes unusually excitable after a feed change, review the ration. Check forage quality, feeding rate, starch intake, and whether the horse is getting enough digestible fibre. Also consider whether turnout, workload, or stress has changed.

Seek **veterinary advice** if weight loss is rapid, the horse refuses feed, the horse shows signs of pain, or faecal changes are severe or persistent. Feeding is important, but it should not delay medical assessment when something appears wrong. Good equine management combines observation, ration review, and professional support when needed.

FAQs about horse feed for supplementary feeding

What is horse feed for supplementary feeding?

Horse feed for supplementary feeding is any feed added to a horse's forage-based diet to bridge gaps in energy, protein, vitamins and minerals, or electrolytes. It is designed to sustain the horse's daily intake without replacing forage such as hay, haylage, or pasture. The aim is to adjust the feed ration to the horse's condition, workload, and nutritional requirements.

How can I tell if my horse needs supplementary feed?

Signs that a horse may need supplementary feeding include a drop in weight, poor body condition score, low energy levels, reduced topline, or difficulty maintaining condition on forage alone. Workload changes, poor grazing, or lower-quality hay may also create a need for extra horse feed. Diet assessment and forage analysis can help verify whether the ration needs adjusting.

What type of horse feed is best for someone new?

For horse feed for beginners, a fibre-based feed balancer or a straightforward starch-light concentrate is often the most practical option to start. Such feeds support digestive health, are more straightforward to manage, and can help avoid excess starch intake. The best choice depends on whether the horse needs extra calories, vitamins and minerals, or just a better-rounded nutritional base.

How much does horse feed cost on average?

Horse feed cost varies based on bag size, the quality of the feed, and the amount you feed daily. A denser balancer may cost more per bag but cost less each day, while larger bags of standard feed may appear cheaper but require a higher daily ration. The best way to assess cost is to compare the daily price of the full feed plan, not just the shelf price.

Can I use a horse feed calculator to work out the right ration?

Yes, a horse feed calculator uk tool can help estimate a starting daily ration based on weight, workload, and condition. However, it should be used alongside practical checks such as body condition score, appetite, energy levels, and dung consistency. A calculator is a guide, while real-world observation confirms whether the ration is working.

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