

Prepare your horse for cold weather

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The recent snowstorm is a good reminder that winter is not far away but have you thought about winterizing your horse? Just because it snows and gets cold doesn't mean you can forget about your four-legged, equine friend. Some things to prepare for include meeting your horse's energy requirements, checking water, providing shelter and blanketing (maybe).

When the temperatures drop and the wind picks up, your horse will need additional energy to keep warm. Think about supplying your horse with hay and if you already feed hay, consider increasing the amount of hay you are giving to him or feeding a more energy dense source of hay (e.g. legume versus grass). Also, feed more than once a day, such as once in the morning and once in the evening. Think about including a concentrate in his diet to supply additional energy. Ideally, you would like your horse going into winter a little fatter than normal (Body condition score: 6-7). For a horse that is a moderate body condition score (meaning 4.5-5.5), the critical temperature for your horse will depend on his hair coat. A horse with a short hair coat can have a lower critical temperature of 60°F, and a heavy hair coat would be 30°F. So, any temperature below this level, the horse will have to burn energy to make his own heat.

A good rule of thumb is each degree below the critical temperature causes an increase in digestible energy requirements for 1% of the body temperature maintenance. Ideally, a horse should consume about 2% of its body weight in food (forage or concentrate). Some owners prefer to supply 1.5% in forage and supplement the 0.5% with concentrate (grain) and others depending on the activity level of the horse can get by with supplying all 2% with forage (hay or grass). However, when you factor in the drop in temperature and wind-chill factor, additional energy is needed. So, for a horse that weights 1,000 pounds and has a heavy hair coat, and the temperature with the wind-chill is 20°F, he will require an increase in energy of 10 percent (the temperature has dropped 10 degrees below the critical, 30°F, 1% for every dropped degree=10%). Therefore, the owner will need to supply the horse will an additional 2Mcal/day or 2 more pounds of hay per day to avoid loss in body condition (1,000 lb horse should now be consuming 17 pounds of hay).

Remember you can also supplement the horse's diet with concentrates (grain). Some horses may not consume a large quantity of hay at one feeding, so feed this amount over several feeding times (e.g. morning and evening). Other things to consider are if your horse has access to shelter and are the conditions wet? If the horse does not have access to shelter and it's in wet conditions this can drive up the amount of energy needs even more (1,000 pound horse that's wet and no shelter in 30°F would now need 25lbs of hay).

Also, don't forget to check your horse's water. An increase in forage intake and a decrease in water intake is a recipe for colic! So, try to monitor your horse's water intake, make sure the tanks are thawed out or a heater is in place. Ideally, the water should be maintained around 45-65 degrees. A 1,000 pound horse should consume about 12 gallons of water a day.

So, what about keeping a blanket on your horse to keep him warm? If you do choose to keep your horse blanketed all winter remember to have a waterproof blanket and check your horse regularly. Often times owners place blankets on their horses and forget to monitor their body condition and come spring they are skinny! Also, make sure you purchase a blanket that fits your horse properly and does not rub him. An oversized blanket will do little good and if it rubs your horse's shoulders raw this is bad also!

Winter tips to Remember:

- **Monitor your horse's body condition**
- **Supply extra hay and even grain when the critical temperature drops**
- **Ideally have shelter for your horse (well ventilated shelter)**
- **If you blanket, make sure the blanket fits properly and doesn't rub**
- **Use a water proof blanket**
- **Remove blanket frequently**
- **Check water twice a day.**

For more information on properly winterizing your horse check out these free webinars:

Winterizing your Horse from Purina Mills:

Dr. Katie Young, November 3rd, 7-8:30 PM EST- Winterize your Horse

<https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/579461330>

Dr. Karen Davison, November 12th, 7-8:30 PM EST- Winterize your Working Horse

<https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/704389579>

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