

Horse feed vs concentrates: a straightforward distinction

The simplest way to understand **horse feed** and **concentrates** is this: horse feed is the general term for whatever you give a horse to eat, while concentrates are a special category of feed designed to supply extra **energy**, **protein**, or other nutrients in a more compact portion than forage.

Forage is at the core of most equine diets. It includes grass, hay, haylage, and other fibrous feeds that provide **roughage** and aid the horse's **digestive system**. Concentrates, by contrast, are usually less **fibre** and richer in **digestible energy**, often with more **starch** and sometimes more protein. That means they can be helpful for horses with higher **energy requirements**, but they need to be used thoughtfully to maintain **nutritional balance** and good **gut health**.

In practice, the difference is not just about ingredients. It is also about use. A forage-based diet can work well for many horses, especially a **maintenance horse**, while concentrates may be added for a **performance horse**, a horse in hard **workload**, or one needing help with weight, condition, or recovery.

What qualifies as horse feed?

The expression **types of horse feed** encompasses a large range of products. It can feature straight feeds such as oats or linseed, compound feeds, balancers, chaffs, cubes, and pellets. It also includes **complete horse feed**, which is designed to meet the horse's nutritional needs when fed as the main feed with forage or, in some cases, as the full ration depending on the product and the horse's needs.

A **horse feed mix recipe** may be home-made or commercially blended. For example, some owners blend a fibre base, a conditioning source, and a vitamin and mineral supplement to create a tailored **feed ration**. Others select ready-made feeds from **horse feed companies** because these are designed with clear **feed label** guidance, measured **starch levels**, and consistent quality.

Common horse feed products include:

- **Complete horse feed** for straightforward feeding and balanced nutrition
- **Conditioning** mixes for horses that need weight or topline support
- Low-energy fibre feeds for simpler management
- Performance feeds for horses with higher output needs
- Balancers and supplements to address specific gaps in the equine diet

One well-known example among **horse feed companies** is **spillers horse feed**, which features a broad range of products for different workloads, body conditions, and feeding goals. Brand choice matters less than matching the product to the horse's daily intake, workload, and digestive needs.

What are concentrates and when should they be used?

Concentrates are diets that deliver more nutrients per kilo than forage. They are typically used as an **energy source** when forage alone cannot meet the horse's requirements, especially for horses in intense work, horses that find it hard to keep condition, or horses with specific dietary needs.

Many concentrates are designed for **conditioning**, meaning they help improve body condition score, topline, or overall weight without requiring huge feed volumes. Others are built for performance and focus on the horse's **digestibility**, using ingredients that are simpler for the horse to process and absorb.

Concentrates are not automatically “better” than forage. They are simply more concentrated in nutrients. They may contain cereals, oil, protein sources, fibre, vitamins, and minerals, depending on the formulation. Because some concentrates are higher in **starch**, they must be fed in sensible amounts to protect **gut health** and maintain a steady feeding schedule.

In short, concentrates are used when the horse’s **energy requirements** go beyond what a forage-based diet can comfortably supply, or when a horse needs help with weight, condition, or work performance.

Types of horse feed explained

Knowing the main **types of horse feed** helps you choose a ration that fits the horse’s body, workload, and lifestyle. Three common forms are **chaff**, **pellets**, and **cubes**.

Chaff is chopped fibre, often made from straw, hay, or alfalfa. It helps slow down eating, adds fibre content, and can be useful in a **bucket feed** to improve chewing and reduce meal speed. Chaff also helps bulk out the ration without adding too much starch.

Pellets are compact, uniform feeds made from ground ingredients. They are straightforward to measure, mix well with other components, and often provide a balanced nutritional profile. Some pellets are designed as a complete feed, while others act as a concentrate or balancer.

Cubes are similar to pellets but usually larger. They can be helpful for horses that chew well and need a more substantial feed texture. Like pellets, cubes may be fibre-based or concentrate-based, so the **feed label** matters more than the shape alone.

When comparing these **types of horse feed**, think about how they fit into the horse’s equine diet. A horse that lives on grass and hay may only need a fibre-based chaff or low-calorie balancer. A horse in harder work may benefit from pellets or cubes that add more **energy** and **protein**.

Do you need concentrates or can a horse live on forage?

For most horses, the answer is yes: a horse can thrive on **forage** alone, provided that the forage is nutritious and available in sufficient amounts. Horses are designed to eat **roughage** for most of the day, and a **forage-based diet** promotes natural digestion, stable behaviour, and better **gut health**.

However, whether forage alone is enough depends on the horse’s **body weight**, **body condition**, age, health, and **workload**. A horse in light work may do well on forage with a balancer or mineral support, while a **performance horse** may need extra concentrates to cover energy and nutrient demand.

Complete horse feed can be useful when owners want a easier system, especially if they are managing forage of limited quality or a busy feeding schedule. Even so, many horses still do best with forage as the main part of the ration, because it supports the digestive system and helps avoid too much starch in the diet.

As a rule, concentrate feeding should meet a need, not become the default. If the horse can maintain a healthy **condition score** on forage and sensible management, extra concentrates may not be necessary.

Horse feeding guidelines every owner should know

Good **horse feeding rules** are vital to ensure safety, routine, and lasting health. The well-known **10 rules of feeding horses** are commonly outlined in different ways, but the guideline remains the same: approach feeding with the horse’s digestive system in mind, not just convenience.

Below [overweight horse feed](#) are practical rules every owner should follow:

- Set the ration on forage first.
- Switch feeds gradually to protect gut health.
- Tailor the feed to workload, body condition, and age.
- Avoid excess starch, especially in cereal-heavy diets.
- Provide fresh water at all times.
- Set feed amounts by daily intake, not guesswork.
- Check the feed label to check starch levels, fibre content, and nutrient profile.
- Break up concentrate meals into smaller portions when needed.
- Follow a regular feeding schedule.
- Review the ration whenever workload, body weight, or condition score changes.

These **horse feeding rules** are not just about avoiding digestive upset. They promote nutritional balance, [pelleted horse feed](#) stable energy, and a healthy appetite. Excess starch can upset the hindgut, while too little fibre can compromise chewing and gut function. The best feeding plans always match the horse's natural patterns.

How to follow a horse feeding chart

A **horse feeding chart** is a practical beginning guide for planning each day's ration. It lets you approximate how much forage and concentrate a horse may need based on **body weight**, **workload**, and **condition score**. It is not an exact formula, but it gives structure to feeding decisions.

Most charts begin with the horse's approximate body weight and then set feed amounts depending on whether the horse is a maintenance horse, light worker, moderately worked horse, or performance horse. A horse with poor body condition may need a adjusted feeding approach from one that holds weight easily.

When reading a **horse feeding chart**, start with these steps:

- Estimate the horse's body weight as accurately as possible.
- Evaluate body condition score to judge whether the horse is underweight, ideal, or overweight.
- Review workload and how much exercise the horse truly does.
- Check whether forage alone meets the horse's needs.
- Add concentrates only if the chart and condition suggest they are necessary.

Charts are valuable, but they should never replace observation. If the horse is getting thinner, becoming lethargic, or showing signs of poor coat quality or digestive upset, the ration may need adjusting. A sensible feed plan responds to the horse, not just the numbers.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost varies depending on the type of product, brand, formulation, and **bag size**. A small sack might appear more affordable at the till, but the cost per day or per feed may be higher than with a larger bag. So checking unit cost matters more than looking at the label price alone.

Brand, nutrient density, and ingredient quality all affect price. Some **horse feed companies** make specialist performance or conditioning feeds that cost more because they contain higher-quality ingredients, added

supplements, or carefully controlled starch and fibre levels. Others offer basic fibre feeds or utility mixes that may suit simpler rations.

If you want to estimate spend, a **horse feed calculator uk** can help you work out likely monthly costs based on feed amount, bag size, and price per bag. This is especially useful if you are comparing a complete feed with a home-blended ration.

To make cost decisions easier, look at:

- Price per kilo
- Feed quantity per day
- How far one bag goes
- Whether it reduces the need for add-ons
- How much hay or forage it needs too

A feed that seems expensive may actually be cost-effective if it reduces the need for extra supplements or performs better in terms of condition and digestibility.

Horse feed advice for beginners

If you are new to ownership, **horse feed for beginners** should focus on simplicity, safety, and consistency. Start with forage, learn the horse's normal appetite and behaviour, and only add extra feeds if there is a clear reason. Good **horse feed advice uk** usually begins with the basics: forage quality, water, body condition, and the horse's work pattern.

For beginners, a **bucket feed** can be a straightforward way to deliver a measured ration. Keep it simple: one main feed, a sensible quantity, and no sudden changes. A complex mix of multiple concentrates and several **supplements** can be harder to manage and may create imbalances.

A practical beginner starting point is:

- Make forage the core of the ration.
- Choose a feed well matched for the horse's age and workload.
- Inspect the label for starch, fibre, protein, and feeding rate.
- Add any new feed over several days.
- Track body condition score regularly.

When people ask for the "best" beginner ration, the answer is often a plain one: a practical forage-first plan, plus a simple complete feed or balancer if needed. That cuts the chance of overfeeding while still meeting the horse's needs.

Choosing the right feed for your horse's workload and condition

The right **horse feed** depends on workload, **body condition**, and how the horse uses calories each day. A horse with low activity usually needs fewer calories and less concentrate. A horse in moderate or hard work may need more **energy**, more **protein**, or a feed with a higher digestible energy value.

Workload should always be assessed honestly. A horse that hacks once or twice a week does not need the same ration as a **performance horse** in regular training. Overfeeding can lead to excess weight and poor condition score, while underfeeding can reduce performance, recovery, and overall welfare.

Scoops can be a handy way to measure feed, but they should be standardised as much as possible. Different products weigh very differently per scoop, so always check the actual weight rather than relying on volume alone. This matters especially when managing a **feed ration** for a horse that needs precise control.

As a basic principle:

- For easy keepers, prioritise forage and a low-calorie balancer.
- For horses needing more condition, look at conditioning feeds and fibre-rich concentrates.
- For performance horses, choose feeds that support energy without excessive starch.
- For horses with poor digestive tolerance, favour fibre and lower starch levels.

The most effective ration is the one that supports the horse's workload while preserving body condition, digestive comfort, and steady energy.

Frequently asked questions on horse feed and concentrates

What exactly is the distinction between horse feed and concentrates?

Horse feed is the broad term for whatever fed to a horse, including hay, compound feeds, and balancers. **Concentrates** are a particular kind of feed that delivers more energy and nutrients in a smaller amount than forage, and they are usually introduced when the horse's diet needs extra support.

Can a horse be fed only forage?

Yes, many horses can be fed only **forage** if it is high quality and available in enough quantity. A forage-only or forage-based diet can be suitable for a maintenance horse, but some horses with greater exercise demands, low body condition, or specific nutritional needs may require more concentrates or a complete horse feed.

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Are complete horse feeds the same as concentrates?

Not always. **Complete horse feed** can sometimes function as a concentrate, but it is formulated to provide a more rounded nutrient profile. Some complete feeds are designed to be fed as the core ration alongside forage, while other concentrates are simply calorie-rich additions to the diet.

How can I tell how much horse feed to provide?

Use a **horse feeding chart**, your horse's **body weight**, current **condition score**, and actual **workload** as your guide. Start with the manufacturer's feeding advice, then adjust based on the horse's reaction, appetite, and body condition. A **horse feed calculator uk** can also help estimate daily use and cost.

What is the best horse feed for a beginner owner?

The best **horse feed for beginners** is usually a straightforward, forage-led ration with one appropriate feed rather than several mixed products. A plain balancer, low-starch complete feed, or fibre-based bucket feed often works for new owners well. Follow **horse feed advice uk**, use clear feeding rules, and make changes gradually to protect gut health.