

Why grazing horses may still need horse feed

Healthy **grazing** is the cornerstone of most horses' diets, but it doesn't always meet every need. Grass provides **forage**, water, natural fibre and some calories, yet **a horse's nutrition** is about far more than simply filling the stomach. A horse may still need extra **horse feed** if the grass is limited, very lush but low in certain nutrients, or not enough to meet **calorie requirements** for the horse's age, size or work.

A forage-first method is typically the starting point. That means focusing on grass, **hay** or **haylage** before introducing hard feed. However, forage alone may not provide enough **protein, vitamins and minerals**, or calories for horses with increased needs. It may also be insufficient for horses that need support for **weight management**, condition, or **performance**.

The key question is not whether a horse is grazing, but whether that grazing is enough. A horse in easy work may do very well with minimal extra feed, while another horse with a heavier **workload** or quicker **metabolism** may need a well-chosen ration. The aim is **diet balance**: enough forage for **digestive health** and **gut health**, plus the proper top-up feed where needed.

Think of horse feeding as a three-part check:

- Exactly how much forage the horse is really receiving.
- If the horse is holding **body condition score**.
- Whether energy, minerals and fibre are sufficient for the horse's lifestyle.

Types of horse feed to consider

There are plenty of **types of horse feed**, and the best choice depends on what the grazing is lacking. Common options include **nuts, mixes**, fibre-based feeds, and compound feeds designed to replace part or all of the ration. The most suitable **horse feed** is the one that maintains the horse's condition without disrupting the diet.

Nuts are often a simple, tidy option and can be useful for horses that need a controlled ration. **Mixes** usually contain a combination of ingredients and may be chosen for palatability, extra calories, or convenience. Some feeds are higher in starch, while others are built around fibre and oil to give **slow release energy**.

When comparing feed, look beyond the marketing name. Check the feed label for the energy level, starch, fibre content, protein, and added minerals. The goal is to tailor the feed to the forage base and the horse's needs, not simply to pick the most popular bag on the shelf.

Complete horse feed vs straights and balancers

A **complete horse feed** is designed to provide a broad range of nutrients in one product, though the horse still needs access to forage. This can be a useful choice for owners who want simplicity and a clear ration. A **balancer** is different: it is a concentrated feed used in small amounts to supply **vitamins and minerals**, and sometimes amino acids, without adding many calories.

Straights are individual ingredients such as oats, beet pulp, or barley. They can be useful, but they require more knowledge to maintain **diet balance**. If you mix straights without planning, it is easy to underfeed key nutrients or push starch too high.

For grazing horses, a balancer can work well when the horse gets plenty of grass or forage but needs nutritional coverage. A complete feed may suit horses that need a more substantial ration in fewer meals. Straights can be

appropriate for experienced owners who understand how to build a balanced **ration**.

When a chaff or fibre feed helps

Chaff and **fibre feed** products are commonly beneficial alongside grazing. They extend the chewing time, aid **digestive health**, and can help maintain the horse satisfied between meals. Fibre-based products are also a useful way to add volume without overdoing starch.

Many fibre feeds are helpful for horses needing **slow release energy**, especially those that become sharp on cereal-heavy rations. Using chaff can also improve **palatability** and make a smaller feed feel more substantial. For horses with a sensitive stomach, fibre-led feeding often supports **gut health** more effectively than large amounts of hard feed.

Chaff is not a complete answer on its own, but it can be a smart part of the overall diet. Used well, it helps spread the feed, slow intake, and support a forage-based approach.

Horse feeding rules to follow for grazing horses

There are a number of practical **horse feeding rules** that support grazing horses healthy. They are often the same guidelines taught in the **10 rules of feeding horses**, even if different yard managers describe them slightly differently. The key point is regularity, forage-first feeding, and avoiding sudden changes that upset **gut health**.

First, make forage the base of the diet. Even when grass is available, horses often do better with added hay or haylage if pasture intake is uncertain. Second, feed little and often rather than giving large meals. Then, introduce any new feed gradually so the digestive system can adapt.

A strong **feeding routine** matters as much as the feed itself. Horses thrive on predictable mealtimes and steady access to forage where possible. Avoid long gaps without fibre, especially for horses that are stabled for part of the day. Consistency supports digestive comfort, stable energy, and better weight control.

Good rules also include checking body condition regularly, adjusting to the seasons, and avoiding overreliance on treats or concentrates. A horse fed from a clear routine is easier to manage and less likely to experience diet-related problems.

How much to feed and feeding frequency

Portion size should be based on the horse, not a fixed scoop measure. The amount needed depends on **workload**, grass availability, body size, and the horse's current **body condition score**. A horse in light work may only need a balancer or fibre feed, while a horse in harder work may need a larger, more energy-dense ration.

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Feeding frequency is important too. Smaller, more frequent meals are usually better for digestion than large buckets of feed. This helps support **gut health** and reduces the risk of digestive upset. For many horses, two or three small hard-feed meals a day is more suitable than one large one.

If a horse is dropping condition, raising feed should be slow and driven by the actual problem. When the horse is carrying too much weight, the answer may be to reduce concentrates, add more exercise if suitable, and review forage quality rather than simply slashing intake.

How to use a horse feeding chart

A **horse feeding chart** helps convert basic recommendations into a usable feed plan. It is especially useful when comparing pasture, hay, haylage, hard feed, and supplements. A good chart is a straightforward planning aid, not a fixed set of rules. The best charts work alongside a **horse feed calculator uk** tool or a feed company guide, plus your own observations of the horse.

Start with **condition scoring**. This means evaluating the horse's shape, fat cover, and muscle to estimate whether the current diet is right. Then factor in **weight**, workload, age, and the amount of forage the horse gets each day. The chart should help you answer: is the horse getting enough to hold, gain, or reduce condition?

Feed charts are most helpful when updated regularly. As grazing changes with the seasons, so should the ration. A horse that keeps weight on summer grass may need more support when pasture quality drops or when hay replaces turnout.

What a basic grazing plus feed chart should show

A basic grazing-plus-feed chart should show estimated **forage intake**, any **hard feed**, and the amount of **mineral intake** provided by a balancer or supplement. It should also reflect the goal of the ration, such as maintenance, condition gain, or performance support.

Good **ration planning** means listing the forage base first, then adding only the feed needed to fill the gap. This keeps the diet simple and reduces the chance of overlap or deficiency. If the horse gets plenty of good grass, a small amount of balancer may be enough. If the forage is limited or the horse is working harder, the chart may need to include nuts, mixes, or a complete feed.

The chart should also help with practical checks: is the horse alert, settled, and maintaining condition? If the answer is yes, the ration may already be close to right.

How to choose feed for various horses

For **horse feed for beginners**, the most useful advice is usually to stick to the basics. Begin with the horse's **age**, **work level**, and **metabolism**. A juvenile or developing horse, a senior horse, and a horse in active training all have varied needs, even if they all have access to grazing.

Age influences how efficiently a horse uses feed. Younger horses may need support for growth, while older horses may need more digestible fibre and better nutrient density. Work level changes the calorie requirement, and metabolism affects how easily the horse holds or loses weight. Some horses stay round on very little, while others need more concentrated support just to maintain condition.

Always ask whether the feed is filling a genuine gap. If the horse has good grass, calm behaviour, and stable condition, a balancer or fibre-based option may be enough. If the horse is lacking topline, dropping weight, or needing better recovery, [Click here for more](#) a more substantial feed may be needed.

Easy keepers, poor doers and performance horses

An **easy keeper** usually does better on forage, a low-calorie balancer, and careful control of extra energy. Too much hard feed can quickly cause unwanted weight gain and may increase the risk of metabolic issues. For these horses, body condition is the main guide.

A **poor doer** may need more calories, higher fibre, and feeds that support steady intake without excessive starch. A fibre-led ration with oil or digestible energy sources is often more useful than a sugary or cereal-heavy mix.

Monitor **body condition** closely and adjust gradually.

A **performance horse** usually needs more targeted support for recovery, stamina, and muscle function. That may mean a complete feed, a performance nut, or a balanced mix designed for higher **workload**. In this group, feed choice should support energy delivery without making the horse fizzy or uncomfortable.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost changes depending on the product type, feeding rate, and the size of the horse's ration. A bag that looks expensive may actually provide good **value for money** if the daily amount is small. Likewise, a less expensive product can end up costly if the horse needs large quantities to meet its needs.

When planning a **feed budget**, consider in daily cost rather than bag price. Add in the cost of balancers, chaff, mixes, nuts, and any supplements that are genuinely needed. The best budget is one that keeps the horse healthy while avoiding waste.

It also helps to remember that the most affordable option is not always the most economical. If a feed does not suit the horse, you may end up adding extras to patch the ration. A well-matched feed often reduces money over time.

Comparing horse feed companies and product types

Different **horse feed companies** present different philosophies, ingredient profiles, and feeding rates, so **brand comparison** is important. One company may focus on fibre-based feeds, while another may have a broader range of energy-dense mixes or specialist balancers. The right choice depends on your horse's needs and your confidence in reading the **feed label**.

When comparing products, check **cost per day**, not just the retail price. Also see whether the feed is suitable for the horse's age, workload, and condition. A feed may be popular, but if it is too rich, too low in fibre, or not palatable enough for your horse, it is not the right choice.

Smart comparison leads to better ration planning and fewer trial-and-error purchases.

Popular horse feed ranges and options

A lot of owners ask for a known name such as **spillers horse feed** because a popular **brand range** can make choosing feel easier. Brand reputation can help, but the key factor is **feed suitability**. A feed that suits one horse may be entirely wrong for another.

Look for practical **horse feed advice uk** based on the horse's condition, grass intake, and workload. A diverse brand range can be valuable because it may include a balancer, a complete feed, fibre options, and performance products, allowing you to tailor the ration more precisely.

Use brand names as a first step, not the final decision. Check the nutrition analysis and match the feed to the horse in front of you.

Can you make a horse feed mix recipe?

A **horse feed mix recipe** can be made at home, but **homemade feed** needs careful planning. The appeal is obvious: you choose the **ingredients**, control the texture, and can sometimes tailor the ration to the horse. However, the challenge is ensuring **nutrient balance**.

Basic mixes may include fibre sources, oil, and a base ingredient, but they still need the right mineral coverage and enough protein and energy for the horse. Without that, a homemade ration can become unbalanced very quickly. This is especially important if the horse is in work, growing, older, or prone to weight issues.

If you want to create your own mix, keep it conservative and seek professional guidance. In many cases, a well-formulated commercial feed is safer and easier than building a ration from scratch. Homemade feeding can work, but only when the nutrition is properly understood.

Fast quiz: what feed should I give my horse?

Follow this straightforward decision guide to help with **selecting feed**. This does not replace personal advice, but it can help you match the feed to the horse profile and **feeding needs**.

- **Is grazing plentiful and the horse maintaining weight?** A nutrient balancer or small fiber feed may be enough.
- **Is the horse getting thinner?** Choose more digestible roughage, extra calories, or a complete horse feed.
- **Is the horse too heavy?** Lower calorie-dense feed and emphasize forage quality and controlled portions.
- **Is the horse in more demanding work?** Pick a ration that supports energy, recovery, and performance without too much starch.
- **Does the horse need improved topline or minerals?** A balancer may be the best first step.

In simple terms, begin with forage, review condition, then add the minimum feed needed to fill the gap. This is the easiest way to keep the ration purposeful and horse-led.

Common feeding mistakes to avoid

One of the biggest mistakes is **overfeeding**. More is not necessarily better, especially if the horse already has good grazing. Extra calories can lead to unwanted weight gain and may contribute to metabolic stress. Another common issue is ignoring **laminitis** risk in horses prone to weight gain or sugar sensitivity.

Colic risk can increase when feeding is inconsistent, forage is too limited, or the ration changes too quickly. A **sudden diet change** can disrupt the hindgut and upset digestion. Always make feed changes gradually and keep the overall routine steady.

A final mistake is choosing feed based only on price, trend, or label claims. The right horse feed is the one that suits the horse's grazing, condition, workload and digestibility needs. If you stay forage-first, monitor body condition, and adjust slowly, you are much more likely to get the balance right.

FAQ

Do horses need hard feed if they have good grazing?

Not always. If the grazing is strong and the horse is keeping a healthy body condition score, hard feed may not be necessary. Some horses only need pasture and perhaps a balancer to cover vitamins and minerals. Others, especially working hard or with higher energy requirements, may still need horse feed alongside grazing.

What is the best horse feed to use with grazing?

The best horse feed depends on the horse's requirements. For many grazing horses, a balancer or fibre feed is a practical starting point. If the horse needs more calories, a complete horse feed, nuts, or a thoughtful mix may be

better. The key is choosing feed that supports diet balance without adding unnecessary starch.

How much horse feed should I give alongside grass?

Give only enough to fill the nutritional gap left by the grass. Portion size depends on workload, weight, body condition score, and whether the horse is holding, adding, or losing condition. Feed frequency should usually be steady and frequent rather than one large meal.

Is a complete horse feed better than mixing my own ration?

For many owners, yes, because a complete horse feed is more straightforward to balance and reduces the risk of mistakes. Mixing your own ration with straights can work, but it requires more knowledge to maintain nutrient balance. If you are unsure, a complete feed or balancer is often the better choice.

How do I know if my horse needs more or less feed?

Check body condition, behaviour, weight, and how the horse looks in work. If condition is dropping or the horse seems tired, it may need more energy or better-quality forage support. If it is building excess weight, reduce calorie-dense feed and review the ration. Condition scoring is one of the clearest ways to inform feed changes.