

WHAT IS THE RIGHT KIND OF FORAGE FOR YOUR HORSE?

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Deciding what forage to feed your horse can be a difficult decision. There are a few simple questions that you need to ask yourself in order to simplify the selection of the right forage type.

Question 1 - What is the age of your horse?

The age of your horse will help determine its nutrient requirements. If the horse is young (birth to 2 years), its nutritional needs are driven by growth. The other type of horse that has nutrient requirements that are sensitive to age are old horses. However, a senior horse does not become “senior” based solely on age. A horse is considered “nutritionally senior” when it can no longer eat its same diet and maintain body condition. These forages are typically pelleted, and in severe cases, can be soaked and made into a mash to facilitate easier consumption by the horse.



Question 2 - What is the physiological stage or use of the horse?

There are several different physiological stages the horse can be in.

For example:

- *Stallion (non-breeding or breeding)*
- *Pregnancy (early, mid, or late gestation)*
- *Lactation*
- *Growing (foal, weanling or yearling)*

These are easily characterized and have specific nutritional requirements. The activity level is more difficult to discern. The categories of activity used are maintenance or working (light, moderate, heavy, or very heavy exercise). When evaluating activity level, we must look at the amount of work. Most horses that are ridden between 0 and 4 days a week for 30 minutes to 1 hour per ride, undergoing a walk, trot and some canter, would be considered maintenance to light exercise, in terms of feeding requirements. Overestimating or underestimating your horse's activity level will result in either a fat or thin horse. This practice compromises that amount of necessary nutrients that your horse is receiving.

Question 3 - Has your horse been diagnosed with any relevant medical issues?

Relevant medical conditions can include anything from gastric ulcers, to allergies, to kidney problems to metabolic diseases, such as tying-up, obesity, insulin resistance, laminitis and Cushing's. Avoid self-diagnoses and ensure experts in the field have diagnosed the horse's issue correctly.

Question 4 - What is your horse's body weight?

It is critical that we be able to assess the body weight of our horses so that we know how much to feed them. To estimate body weight, you can use a weight tape or the following equation:

Girth (inches) x girth (inches) x length (inches)/330 = weight (pounds)
(Carroll & Huntington, 1988)

The nutrient requirements designed for horses are based on the horse's body weight. Horses should be fed 1.5-2.5% of their body weight in forage per day, which comes out to be 15-25 pounds per day. The specific amount goes back to question number two, involving the use of the horse (maintenance or working).

Summary

Using these four criteria, you should be better equipped in selecting the right forage for your horse. Locally supplied hay in your area may not fit the criteria of hay you need for your horse. Standlee Premium Western Forage® produces consistent, quality forage for all horses and has a distribution network throughout the whole country. Visit our "Store Locator" tool on our website to locate the closest supplier to you.

