

Be Prepared for Winter at the Barn

Make sure you've adequately prepared your horse and barn for winter. These key points will help get you started.

- Blanketing is optional for most horses, but necessary for those that are clipped. Make sure your blankets are clean and in good repair.
- Keep checking your hay supply for mold and dust throughout the season. Horses need 10-20 lbs of good quality hay per day in winter.
- If your horse is a hard keeper, gradually increase his caloric intake by adding an extra daily grain feeding or a top dress of vegetable oil to his grain.
- Use water heaters to ensure that your horse's water supply doesn't freeze (check regularly.)
- If your horse doesn't like to drink cold water, add some warm water to his grain to create a mash.
- Keep the barn as open as possible to allow good airflow. Horses will tolerate the low temperature better than accumulated dust and ammonia fumes.
- Mud in the pasture that can become treacherous ice patches. Add some loose gravel to high-traffic areas and move hay and water feeders to high ground.
- Keep your horse on a regular hoof-trimming schedule, and if he can't go barefoot, talk to your farrier about special winter shoes to prevent slipping
- Clean hooves regularly as winter mud can increase the risk of thrush.
- Have a dental exam performed before winter, especially with older horses.
- Monitor your horse's weight and body condition. Long winter coats can hide boniness, so use your hands to feel for weight loss.
- Groom your horse frequently to warm his muscles and monitor his condition.