

Year-Round

HORSE CARE

By Kim Abbott



**LEARN
HOW TO**
**care for your horse
with the changing
seasons.**

HORSE
ILLUSTRATED

**Horse
Channel.com**
the website for horse lovers



Year-Round HORSE CARE

Winter, spring, summer and fall bring about changes in the weather and environment that affect a horse's health needs, from feeding to parasite control and farrier care. Here's a guide to help you keep your horse healthy throughout the year. Every horse is different, so it's important to talk to your veterinarian and farrier when planning a schedule for equine care.



LESLEY WARD

WINTER

DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY

Depending on the area of the country you live in, you may be faced with snow and ice or rain and mud during the coldest months of the year. Arctic temperatures usually warrant some increases in a horse's diet and send many equestrians into hibernation. Make sure your to-do list covers all of the following health care basics for your horse.

Feed: The digestion of fiber in the horse's large intestine produces heat that warms him from the inside out. Since the best source of fiber is long-stem forage, you should increase your horse's hay intake during the winter. Grain doesn't offer this benefit and adding more to your horse's diet only increases his risk for health issues.

Water: A horse should always have access to clean, fresh water; however, winter can make that difficult when freezing temperatures turn it to ice. For this reason, it's imperative that you check your horse's water every day and break through the ice. If he can't drink the water, he will get dehydrated. Tank heaters will keep the water at a palatable temperature for your horse, but make sure electrical cords are out of the way and secured so your horse can't get caught on them. Check the connections regularly to be sure they are intact and working properly.

Blankets and Shelter: With the fortification of your horse's diet and the fluffy coat he naturally grows beginning



LESUE POTTER



A tank heater will prevent your horse's water from freezing.

LESLEY WARD



LESLEY WARD



LESLEY WARD

in the fall, he generally won't need added protection from a blanket unless he's outside in cold rain or blustery wind. Clipped horses, older horses and those that have trouble growing a long coat or keeping weight on may require additional blanketing. Any time a horse is outside, he should have free access to shelter (such as a three-sided run-in shed).

Clipping: Equestrians who continue to ride frequently during the winter may clip their horses because a long coat makes it difficult for a sweaty horse to cool down after exercise. A blanket or trace clip is best for these horses because it only requires trimming the hair where the horse sweats the most, typically the underside of the neck and chest, leaving the coat long on the body and legs. Those who compete through the season usually give their horse a full-body clip for aesthetics. These horses will need a

wardrobe of blankets, and sometimes hoods or neck covers, to keep warm. (For more information about clipping, visit HorseChannel.com/Clipping)

Parasite Control: Internal parasites can cause health problems such as loss of appetite, weight loss, a dull coat, lethargy and colic. Although many parasites are dormant in the winter, some can survive the cold temperatures and still affect your horse, especially in warmer climates. Your veterinarian will probably recommend a deworming program that requires you to treat your horse every six to eight weeks. Daily dewormer that is administered as a feed supplement is also an option. There are various types (chemical classes) of dewormers that target different parasites.

Hoof Care: Snow and ice quickly build up in a horse's hooves, so picking them daily becomes even more important in the



TRACY EMANUEL

winter. Horseshoe nails and studs developed to provide

traction can be applied to your horse's shoes, or the farrier can fit your horse with specialized rubber pads. For example, an anti-snowball pad has a convex bubble in the middle that pushes snow out as the horse steps on the ground.

Many horse owners simply opt to pull their horse's shoes if they don't plan on riding often. Talk to your farrier to decide which option is best for your horse.

Thrush is a common winter hoof ailment for horses that live in warmer climates, where mud takes the place of snow and ice. Characterized by black, gooey discharge and a foul odor, thrush is an infection of the frog (the V-shaped structure of the hoof that aids in shock absorption) that can be painful and debilitating if left untreated. There are many topical treatments that can be found online or at your local tack store.



LESLEY WARD

SPRING

MARCH, APRIL, MAY

Spring breathes life into all that lies dormant over the winter, including the barn. If you set aside your helmet and riding boots for the winter, you and your horse will need to get back in riding shape gradually. Gear up your horse for the riding season with long, slow distance exercise, and increase his workload over time. Maintain his regular health care routine to make this easier for him.



LESLEY WARD



LESUE POTTER



LESLEY WARD PHOTOS

Wellness Exam: Your horse should be given an overall physical evaluation twice a year. The annual exam may include dental care. A horse's teeth continue to grow throughout his life, and they can be worn to sharp points as a result of grinding hay and grain. For these reasons, the teeth need to be rasped down, or "floated," so your horse can properly chew and digest his food.

Vaccinations: Annual immunizations such as tetanus and rabies are generally administered in the spring. The vet may also vaccinate your horse against other diseases depending on where you live and your horse's level of risk for certain illnesses. (Visit HorseChannel.com/VaccinationChart to create your immunization schedule.)

Parasite Control: Generally, the vet will place your horse on a rotational deworming



Bot fly eggs

schedule that alternates between different chemical classes. This will inhibit parasites from building up a resistance to any one chemical. Broad-spectrum dewormers are often recommended because they contain various chemical classes to kill several parasite species. The appropriate time to target tapeworms in your deworming program can vary depending on where you

live and the risk level in your area. Talk to your vet to develop the right schedule.

Your spring deworming program may also include protection against bot flies. The adult flies lay their tiny, yellow eggs on a horse's chest, forelegs and flanks in late spring and early fall. When the horse ingests the eggs, they develop into larvae and remain in the horse's system until spring, when they are passed in the manure and mature into adults. Remove eggs with a grooming block or a blunt bot knife to prevent ingestion. (Go to HorseChannel.com/Parasites for more information about deworming your horse.)

First Aid Kits: Your barn should always be stocked with emergency care items for humans and horses. Replenish the supplies



TARA GREGG



LESLEY WARD

in your first aid kits at least twice a year, and replace any medications that have expired. (For a list of important items to include in your first aid kits, go to HorseChannel.com/FirstAid)

Skin Problems: Rain rot and scratches are skin ailments caused by bacteria and generally affect horses that are consistently wet and muddy. For most owners, spring is the time of the year when their horses are at the highest risk for these conditions. In warmer areas, winter will be the worst time for these issues.

Rain rot causes hair loss and painful scabbing on a horse's back, while scratches cause inflammation and painful scabs on the heels and the back of the pasterns. Daily grooming and keeping these areas as dry as possible will help prevent skin problems. Turning your horse out in a waterproof, breathable rain sheet on wet days can help as well.

Spring Grazing: Fresh spring grass has a high concentration of a sugar called fructan. Horses that are removed from pasture and fed only hay during the winter are at risk of developing laminitis when they are turned out in a field of this rich new grass. It's best to accustom these horses to lush spring pasture with short periods of grazing every day (about 15 minutes). Gradually increase grazing sessions over time until your horse can stay out with less risk of dangerous digestive and metabolic problems.

Blanket Care: When the warm weather sets in, you can put away your horse's heavy blankets. This is the time to clean and repair them so they'll be ready for next winter. It takes industrial machinery to get this horsey apparel in good order, so you may want to take them to a professional laundry service that has experience in handling horse blankets.

SUMMER

JUNE, JULY, AUGUST

The heat and bothersome insects pose new threats to your horse's health during the summer months. But if he's in shape and receives proper nutrition and health care, you'll be able to ride into the sunset with no worries.

Parasite Control: Stay up to date with the deworming program scheduled by your veterinarian.

Heat: You'll likely be riding at full force by the time summer rolls around, but the hot temperatures can make your activities uncomfortable, and can put you and your horse at risk of heat exhaustion. Stay hydrated and be sure your horse always has access to plenty of fresh, clean water. If he works up a good sweat during your rides, hose him down with cool water when you're done.



LESLEY WARD PHOTOS





Fly Control: Besides being nuisances, flies can carry diseases and cause skin irritation. You can offer your horse some relief by applying fly spray, outfitting him in a mesh fly sheet and mask, and hanging sticky fly tape or fly traps around the barn.

Parasitic wasps provide a more widespread solution because they feed on fly larvae, keeping the population down. While they're bad news for flies, the wasps are not harmful to horses or humans. Delivered in larval form, the wasps can be placed wherever flies reproduce, and should be used before fly season reaches its peak.

Hoof Cracks: Summer's dry weather and hard

ground can cause a barefoot horse's hooves to crack. To prevent small cracks from becoming large and hazardous, apply a topical hoof moisturizer. If poor hoof quality is a problem, you can also supplement your horse's feed with biotin, a nutrient that promotes strong, healthy hooves. Talk to your veterinarian before adding any supplements to your horse's diet.

Your farrier may also round your horse's toes to prevent more cracking. If the problem doesn't improve or gets worse, the farrier may suggest shoeing your horse.





LESLEY WARD PHOTOS

FALL

SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER

The cooler weather of fall is perfect for riding, but eventually it will turn to the bitter cold of winter. Prepare your horse for the frigid months ahead by adding more calories to his diet to help him put on some extra weight that will keep him warm. However, instead of increasing his grain





LESLEY WARD PHOTOS

ration—which can cause colic, laminitis and other health issues—add corn oil or a high-fat supplement. Don't forget to increase his hay intake as well.

Stock up on hay and all other supplies you will need to get you through the winter before it starts getting too cold.

Wellness Exam: It's a good idea to make an appointment with the veterinarian for another overall checkup to be sure your horse has what he needs to stay healthy all winter.

Parasite Control: Fall deworming programs address bots, which begin migrating to the horse's stomach and small intestine during the late fall to hibernate for the winter.

Vaccinations: Maintain the vaccination schedule recommended by your veterinarian.

Hoof Care: Late fall is the time to think about pulling your horse's shoes or adding pads and/or traction devices to keep him



safely on his feet when the snow and ice come around.

By staying on track with your horse's annual and seasonal needs while also maintaining his daily care routine, you will be able to give him a long and healthy life. **HI**

HORSE

I L L U S T R A T E D[®]

We **THANK YOU** for
Subscribing



Elizabeth Moyer
Editor, *Horse Illustrated*

***Horse Illustrated*[®] Subscriber Services**

Have questions about your subscription?

Need to make changes?

Please visit us at **www.custmag.com/HRI**
where you can:

- Change your address
- Pay your account balance
- Confirm receipt of payment
- Check your subscription expiration date
- Report a missing issue
- Give a gift subscription to a friend
- E-mail any other questions or concerns