



Basic Guide to Horse Care

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Introduction

Horses are great companions. If you've never owned a horse before you will be thrilled at the many joys of horse ownership. Many people say that after they bought their first horse and spent some time learning about horses and horse care they wouldn't have been able to imagine a life without horses.

Horses provide more than just great companionship. Horseback riding is a lot of fun and is great exercise. Horseback riding can be very therapeutic for people who have joint problems or arthritis.

A lot of research shows that the motion of a horse can help some physically challenged children and adults recover some of their motor skills and certainly the love and devotion of a horse is a great motivator.

Owning a horse has a lot of benefits for people of every age. Kids can learn a lot from the responsibility of owning a horse, but children need to be supervised when they are caring for their horses so that the child is safe and that the horse gets the care that it needs.

Owning and caring for horses becomes a lifelong passion for many people who find that the rewards of horse ownership make the hard work of horse care worth all the effort and expense.

Are you getting ready to buy a horse? Or have you bought a horse and now need to learn how to take care of it?

Owning a horse is a lot of fun but also a big responsibility. Horses require a lot of care and attention. Deciding what type of housing is best for your horse and what type of diet you should feed your horse are big decisions that will directly impact your horse's health so those decisions need to be made carefully.

Horse care can seem overwhelming at first because there are a lot of decisions to make and a lot of things to consider when you're making those decisions but any horse owner will tell you that all the work is worth it.

Lots of horse owners are happy to share their experiences and expertise with you so if you have questions about your horse or about horse care you shouldn't hesitate or be afraid to ask for help.

SHOULD YOU KEEP YOUR HORSE IN A STABLE OR A PASTURE?

Once you have the horse, where are you going to put it? What is the best type of housing for your horse? Whether you are keeping your horse at home on your own land or boarding your horse with someone else, should you choose to keep your horse in a pasture with some type of run-in shed or shelter or in a stable?

Where to keep your horse is a big decision, and there are pros and cons that go along with keeping your horse in a pasture or keeping your horse in a stable. Factors like location, cost, convenience, the type of weather conditions where you live, and other factors can all play a role in deciding where to keep your horse.

Some Advantages of Keeping Your Horse in a Pasture Are:

- Less maintenance and cleaning for the owner
- More fresh air for the horses
- Cheaper to set up and maintain than a stable
- At a boarding stable, pasture boarding fees are usually about half of stable boarding fees
- No mucking stalls

Some Advantages of Keeping Your Horse in a Stable Are:

- Warmer and drier for the horse
- Cooler in the summer because of the shade
- Easier to isolate a sick horse
- Easier to catch the horse for regular grooming and vet care appointments
- Easier to catch the horse to be ridden
- No injuries from physical fights with other horses

KEEPING YOUR HORSE IN A PASTURE



Horses by nature are animals that live outdoors in all different types of conditions and can get along quite well in a pasture if they are given water, food, and a shelter so that they have some type of shelter if the weather is bad.

Since horses are herd animals, a horse should never be allowed to live in a pasture alone. Horses need companions in order to be properly socialized.

If you are keeping your horse in a pasture then you must have some type of run-in shelter that is easy for the horses to get in and out of and provides shelter from the elements.

The structure should be closed on three sides and open on one side to allow easy access. Pre-made run-in shelters can be nice to have because often, you can take

the shelter down and move it if you want to give the horses more protection from the weather or the sun.

There must be enough room in the shelter to accommodate all the horses that will be kept in that particular shelter. There are pre-made run-in shelters that you can buy and put together or you can build your own. Run-in shelters don't have to be fancy but they do need to be strong enough to withstand the elements.

If you are going to keep your horse in a pasture you must also provide a large tub that is always full of clean drinking water and it's a good idea to provide hay twice a day as well. Using a hay net tied into a tree or onto a fence post is a good way to keep the hay from getting dirty and trampled into the ground. Using a hay net will also keep small critters from stealing the hay or making a nest in the hay.

If you are keeping your horse in a pasture then you have to make sure that regular pasture maintenance is done. Pasture fences need to be checked and repaired regularly. There are different types of fencing that you can use for a horse pasture but most experts recommend that you use solid wood post and rail fencing on all horse pastures. Post and rail fences are the safest for horses.

Barbed wire or electric fences are not usually recommended but if you must use barbed wire or mesh wire fencing you should take brightly colored strips of plastic or neon colored tape and tie a length of the plastic or tape all along the fence line at regular intervals so that the horses can see where the fence is. Most horses have a difficult time seeing wire and if you use wire fencing your horse could end up not seeing the fence and charging right through the fence and getting hurt.

If you do use barbed wire or wire mesh fencing you should always have a pair of wire cutters stashed somewhere close to the gate of the pasture just in case a horse or another animal were ever to get caught in the wire. You'd lose a lot of valuable time if you had to run back to the barn for wire cutters so just hide a pair outside near the gate in case you ever need them. Better to be safe than sorry when it comes to barbed wire and your horse.

KEEPING YOUR HORSE IN A STABLE



Most people prefer to keep their horse in a stable.

Stables don't have to be fancy; you can easily convert an old garage or an old gardening shed to a small stable if you want to keep your horse on your property.

Whether you keep your horse in a stable that you have on your property or you keep your horse in a

boarding stable, there are some general guidelines that you should always follow when keeping your horse in a stable.

There are lots of different kinds of stalls but no matter what the design of the stall is you need to make sure that there are no gaps in the stall that a horse could get a hoof or a leg stuck in.

Horses will sometimes kick or bang at their stall walls and if there are any gaps anywhere in the walls or door of the stall, a horse could get stuck and could get seriously injured.

A standard horse stall is about twelve feet by twelve feet. If you are building a barn for your horse make sure that the stalls are at least that large and if you're going to keep your horse in a boarding stable you should bring a tape measure when you go to visit the stable to make sure that the stalls are at least twelve by twelve. Most horses will not feel comfortable in a stall that is smaller than that.

Horses that are being kept in stables will need access to clean water at all times so a water bucket should be hung in the stall in a place that is easily accessible.

Buckets should always be hung up so that the horse doesn't tip them over. If you are going to feed your horse grain then you will need to put a feed bucket in the stall and that also should be hung up.

Horses kept indoors also will need salt blocks or salt licks so that they can get the extra minerals that they need to stay healthy. A salt block placed in the grain bucket is usually fine, although you can install a special salt block holder in the corner of the stall if you want.

Horses kept in stables can develop behavioral problems if they are not exercised every day or if they don't get enough interaction with people or other horses. Horses are social creatures and they need company.

Horses can become "barn sour" when they are kept isolated or if they are bored and may start displaying bad behaviors like biting at people or other horses, cribbing, pacing, or kicking.



A good way to give your horse the social time it needs and also give it some fresh air is to have the horse turned out for part of the day and kept in the barn for part of the day.

Most boarding stables will turn

your horse out every day for an extra fee so that the horse can spend time outside with other horses. If you won't be able to ride your horse every day, it's worth paying the extra fee to have your horse turned out every day.

BEDDING



If you are going to keep your horse in a stable then the type of bedding that you choose for your horse is very important. There are several types of horse bedding that are commonly used. No matter what type of bedding you ultimately choose to use for your horse you should think about adding a heavy rubber mat underneath the bedding. It will be softer on your horse's feet and it will make cleaning stalls a lot easier because the rubber mat will absorb excess muck.

If you are going to keep your horse at a boarding stable where the stable will be mucking out your horse's stall you should ask them what type of bedding they use if you have a preference. The most commonly used types of bedding for horses are:

Shavings – Pine or fir wood shavings are probably the most common type of horse bedding that you will see. Shavings are fairly absorbent and it's easy to clean stalls when you use shavings because the wet shavings tend to clump, sort of like cat litter, making it easy to pick out the wet spots. One of the major drawbacks of using wood shavings for bedding is that the shavings deposit a fine layer of wood dust over everything in sight so the stable needs to be well ventilated if wood shavings are going to be used as bedding.

Shavings come either in loose bulk piles or bagged up in 50 to 100 pound bundles. Buying loose shavings is much cheaper than buying bagged shavings but if you're going to use loose shavings you will need to have a dry, airtight bin to store the shavings in. Using bagged and bundled shavings is more expensive but also less hassle and using bagged shavings makes it easier to move the shavings into the stalls.

Wood Pellets – Wood pellets are similar to wood shavings but they are more absorbent. The pellets are made from kiln dried wood that is compressed with sawdust to form little hard pellets. As the horse walks around the stall the pellets will break down to sawdust that will absorb moisture.

Wood pellets are very low in dust but cleaning a stall that uses wood pellets is different from cleaning a normal stall and may take some getting used to. If you live somewhere that has very cold winters you might find that the wood pellets aren't as absorbent in the cold so you might want to use different bedding in the winter.