

If you're looking for a **low sugar horse feed** and/or **low starch horse feed**, the best starting point is clear: choose a feed focused on **fibre** and **forage**, with low levels of **sugar**, **starch**, and other **non-structural carbohydrates**. In practical terms, that usually means feeds such as **unmolassed** chaff, **beet pulp**, a carefully chosen **feed balancer**, or a **complete horse feed** designed for low starch intake. The best choice depends on your horse's **body condition score**, **work level**, and whether you are dealing with **laminitis**, excitability, poor weight gain, or an easy-keeping type.

The fastest way to decide is to look for a feed with modest **digestible energy**, a high fibre base, and a clear **nutritional analysis**. A feed can still be suitable even if it is not "grain-free", provided that the levels of starch and sugar are low enough for the horse's needs. The aim is not to remove all carbohydrates, but to **overweight horse feed** choose a diet that helps maintain the **digestive system**, improves **gut health**, and gives **slow release energy** without triggering a high **glycaemic response** or **starch overload**.

What counts as low sugar and low starch horse feed?

In horse nutrition, a **horse feed** is generally considered low in sugar and starch when it keeps the combined levels of **sugar** and **starch** sufficiently low to suit horses that need a carefully managed diet. These carbohydrates are often called **non-structural carbohydrates**, or NSCs. They are the more rapidly digested part of the ration and can have a greater effect on the **glycaemic response** than fibre-rich ingredients.

Low sugar and low starch feeding is especially relevant for horses with **laminitis**, those prone to weight gain, and those that become sharp on richer feeds. A good low-risk feed usually has:

- elevated **fibre** content
- controlled **digestible energy**
- minimal cereal content
- no added molasses, or only minimal amounts, or only minimal amounts
- a sensible balance of **protein, vitamins and minerals**, and fat

Forage remains the foundation of the ration. Good quality **hay** or **haylage** can be part of a low sugar plan, but the actual nutrient profile matters. Some hay is naturally higher in sugar than people expect, so forage-based feeding is not just about quantity; it is also about quality and suitability. A low sugar horse feed should support the forage rather than work against it.

Think of low sugar feeding as a feeding strategy, not just a product label. The whole ration matters: forage, feed, turnout, and workload all influence how a horse responds.

Which types of horse feed work best for reduced sugar and starch?

There are a number of **types of horse feed** that can work well in a low-sugar diet, but some are more helpful than others depending on the horse's condition and workload. If your priority is reducing sugar and starch low, these are the most useful options.

Unmolassed chaff and fibre-based feeds

Chaff is one of the easiest low-sugar options to use because it adds chew time and fibre without loading the ration with starch. The best version is usually **unmolassed** chaff. It can be fed alone with a balancer or used to

carry other ingredients such as chopped forage, beet pulp, or oil. Fibre-based mixes promote gut motility and can help maintain a more settled temperament.

Beet pulp and soaked fibre feeds

Beet pulp is a well-liked ingredient in reduced sugar diets because it provides digestible fibre rather than cereal starch. It is often used soaked as part of a mash or bucket feed. Although it can contribute useful calories, it is usually gentler than cereal-based feeds and often suits horses needing condition without excess starch.

Feed balancer and ration balancer products

A **feed balancer** is a dense source of **vitamins and minerals**, plus amino acids and sometimes protein, designed to top up a forage-based diet. It is ideal for horses that do not need much extra energy but still require nutritional support. Balancers are often a good choice for native breeds, good-doers, and horses on restricted rations. They can also pair well with chaff and forage cubes for a straightforward low sugar feeding plan.

Complete horse feed options

A **complete horse feed** can be suitable if it is formulated as a low **starch**, low sugar product. Complete feeds usually include fibre, some oil, and a balanced vitamin and mineral package so they can be fed as a sole bucket feed. This can be useful for horses that need a convenient ration and where weighing and supplementing separately is not practical. Always check the **nutritional analysis**, because “complete” does not automatically mean low sugar.

Cooling feed and conditioning feed choices

Some products are marketed as **cooling feed** or **conditioning feed**. A cooling feed is often lower in starch and formulated to provide regulated energy, making it useful for overly lively horses. A conditioning feed may provide more calories, often through **oil** and fibre, to help horses gain weight. If you need extra condition, look for one that raises calories mainly through fiber and fat rather than starch.

Among the many **horse feed companies**, there are often comparable low starch options. For example, **spillers horse feed** includes products aimed at fibre-based, controlled-energy feeding. The brand matters less than the ingredients, analysis, and suitability for the individual horse.

How to choose horse feed for laminitis-prone, excitable, or easy-keeping horses

Reliable **horse feed advice** should start with the horse, not the bag. Horses with **laminitis** risk, being excitable, or a tendency to become overweight often do best on a forage-led ration with controlled calories and low non-structural carbohydrates. The right feed depends on the job the horse is doing, but also on how efficiently that horse maintains condition.

Use this practical framework:

- **Laminitis-prone horses:** select very low sugar and low starch feeds, avoid cereal-heavy products, and keep the ration fibre-based.
- **Sensitive horses:** aim for steady, digestible fibre and avoid sudden changes that can upset the digestive system.
- **Easy-keeping horses:** use a balancer, unmolassed chaff, and limited hard feed if forage alone is sufficient.

- **Excitable horses:** choose a cooling feed with low starch and controlled energy from fibre and oil.

It also helps to assess **weight management** through regular body scoring. A horse with a healthy **body condition score** may need only forage plus a balancer, while a thin horse may need extra calories from a better-suited low starch feed. The aim is to match intake to need without pushing starch higher than necessary.

For horses that need more energy for work but still require a low starch diet, seek slow-burning calories from fibre and **oil**. This approach supports **slow release energy** without the sharper rises associated with cereal-based feeds. It is also kinder to the **digestive system** in many cases.

Reading the label: sweetness, carbohydrate, DE, and roughage

Reading a feed label properly is one of the most useful skills you can have. The **nutritional analysis** tells you whether a product is really suitable or just marketed that way. Pay close attention to the values for sugar, starch, and **digestible energy** (often shown as DE).

This is what matters most:

- **Sugar:** lower levels are usually preferable for laminitis-prone or weight-sensitive horses.
- **Starch:** reduced levels can lower the risk of starch overload and can support calmer behaviour.
- **Digestible energy:** indicates how much usable energy the feed provides.
- **Fibre:** more fibre generally means a more forage-friendly feed.

The **ingredients list** is equally important as the analysis. Ingredients are listed in order of inclusion, so cereals near the top often indicate more starch. Look for chopped forage, beet pulp, grass products, soya hulls, and added oil. A feed with a strong fibre base and limited cereals is usually better for low sugar feeding.

Be cautious with claims such as “natural” or “low molasses” unless the numbers support them. An [fibre supplement horse feed unmolassed](#) feed is often a better starting point than one with only a small amount of molasses removed. If the product contains a lot of cereal by-products, the starch may still be higher than you want.

For many horses, the key balance is simple: enough calories for health and work, but not so much starch that the ration becomes unstable. That is why nutritional analysis should guide your choice more than branding or colour of the feed.

Horse feeding guidelines that count when switching feeds

Sound **horse feeding rules** protect digestive function in the horse and lower the risk of problems when changing products. These closely relate to the classic **10 rules of feeding horses**, which stress stability, ample forage, clean water, and careful changes. If you are changing to a low sugar diet, the most important rule is to change gradually.

Below are the key rules to follow:

- Base the ration on **forage** first.
- Introduce feed changes over a number of days or longer if the horse is sensitive.
- Apply a **gradual transition** when moving to a new feed.
- Set the daily ration unchanged in timing and quantity.
- Do not rely on over-reliance on hard feed when forage can meet the need.

- Look for signs of digestive upset, excitability, or loose droppings.

Feeding changes affect the microbial population in the gut, so the digestive shift should never be rushed. A sudden switch from a high cereal ration to a fibre-only plan may seem harmless, but it can still affect the digestive system if done too quickly. Likewise, introducing more beet pulp or oil should be controlled and planned.

Also assess forage quality. If forage is the bulk of the diet, then the forage itself must be appropriate. Low sugar feeding is not just about removing hard feed; it is about creating a complete feeding pattern that helps maintain gut health and stable energy.

Using a horse feeding chart and calculator

A **horse feeding chart** provides you a practical reference point, but it should not replace practical judgment or case-by-case review. A **horse feed calculator** [uk](#) tool can aid in estimate consumption based on **bodyweight**, workload, and the type of feed you are considering. These resources are helpful because feeding rates differ greatly between a resting horse, a light-work horse, and one doing regular exercise.

If you use a chart or calculator, start with these questions:

- What is the horse's estimated **bodyweight**?
- What is the horse's current **body condition score**?
- How much **forage** is already being eaten?
- What is the horse's **work level**?
- Is the aim maintenance, weight loss, or weight gain?

The **feeding rate** on the bag is only a general guide. Some feeds are designed to be fed at low rates as a balancer-style ration; others need a higher volume to supply enough nutrients. If you use a calculator, check whether the ration includes forage, hard feed, and any supplements. The most accurate plan is one that combines the chart with the horse's condition over time.

For horses on restricted diets, the calculator should help avoid overfeeding. For harder keepers, it can show whether the current ration actually delivers enough nutrients without forcing the starch higher. Whichever the situation, it is a valuable check before changing the feed plan.

Popular low-sugar horse feed brands and companies

Many **horse feed companies** offering products designed for lower starch and low sugar feeding. The best-known brands vary in formulation, but the majority have at least one fiber-based or energy-controlled option. **spillers horse feed** is a case in point of a company with products aimed at horses needing reduced starch or more controlled energy intake.

When reviewing brands, pay attention to the product type rather than the logo. A brand may offer:

- a **feed balancer** for forage led diets
- a **low starch feed** for horses needing controlled calories
- a **complete horse feed** for convenience
- a conditioning product that uses fibre and oil rather than cereal

The presence of **pellets** or a **mash** format does not tell you whether the feed is suitable. What matters is the overall composition, especially sugar, starch, fibre, and energy density. A mash can be low sugar, and pellets can be low starch, but the analysis must confirm it.

Brand reputation can be useful, but product selection should always be based on the horse's needs. The best feed for a laminitis-prone good-doer may be very different from the best feed for a poor-doing horse in regular work.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost depends on brand, formulation, bag size, and how much you feed each day. It is easy to focus on **bag price**, but that does not always show the true cost. A more concentrated feed may cost more per bag yet less per day because the **feeding rate** is lower.

To determine **value for money**, compare the daily cost rather than just the bag price. A balancer often seems expensive at first glance, but it may be cheaper than feeding large quantities of a less concentrated mix. Likewise, a low starch complete feed can sometimes replace several separate products, reducing both cost and complexity.

Review these expense factors:

- how many days a bag lasts
- if you also need a supplement
- the cost of adding **beet pulp, oil**, or a balancer
- how much of wasted feed if the horse leaves part of the bucket

Sometimes the cheapest product is not the best option if it leads to overfeeding, poor condition, or unnecessary extras. A practical low sugar ration often saves money by being simpler and more targeted.

Is it possible to make a low sugar horse feed mix recipe?

Yes, a simple **horse feed mix recipe** can be built from a few simple ingredients, provided it is balanced correctly. A common approach is to combine **beet pulp**, unmolassed chaff, a little **oil**, and a **balancer**. This provides fibre, calories, and nutrients without relying on cereal starch.

A simple low sugar mix might include:

- unmolassed chaff
- soaked beet pulp
- a set amount of oil for extra energy
- a balancer for **vitamins and minerals**

This type of ration can work well for horses needing condition, controlled energy, or a calmer feed. It is often a useful option for a **forage-based diet** because it adds useful nutrients without creating a cereal-heavy bowl. However, home mixing should be done carefully. A balanced ration is more than just ingredients; the proportions matter.

If you create your own mix, make sure it supports the horse's **protein** needs and does not unintentionally raise sugar or starch through other components. Also, be mindful of quality control. Ingredients should be fresh and stored well, because poor storage can increase the risk of contamination such as **mycotoxins**.

Horse feed for beginners: common mistakes to avoid

For **horse feed for beginners**, the biggest risk is usually overcomplication. New owners often assume more feed means better care, but that is not always true. The main mistakes are simple to avoid once you understand the basics.

- **Overfeeding:** giving too much hard feed when forage alone would do.
- **Sudden changes:** moving feeds without a **gradual transition**.
- **Starch overload:** using excessive cereal-based feeds for one horse.
- **Ignoring forage:** piling on buckets while forgetting the backbone of the diet.
- **Not checking analysis:** choosing by name rather than by numbers.

Simple feeding plans should be straightforward, consistent, and appropriate to the horse's work and condition. A lot of horses do best on a forage-led ration with a balancer or a very small amount of low starch feed. The horse's temperament, workload, and body condition score should guide the ration more than habit or marketing terms.

Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

Use this quick decision guide as a handy starting point. It is not a substitute for tailored advice, but it can help shortlist the options fast.

- **If your horse is a good-doer or prone to laminitis:** go for forage first, then a balancer or very low sugar feed.
- **If your horse is excitable:** look for a cooling feed that is low in starch and based on fibre and oil.
- **If your horse needs to gain condition:** pick a low starch conditioning feed, beet pulp, and oil rather than cereal-heavy mixes.
- **If your horse works lightly:** a balancer plus chaff may be enough.
- **If your horse is thin and in harder work:** feed a feed with controlled digestible energy and enough protein.

This is where a **horse condition score** becomes useful. A horse that is overweight needs a different diet from one that is lacking muscle or topline. The same is true for **work level**: a horse doing little work rarely needs a dense feed, while a horse in regular training may need more energy than forage alone can provide. Think in terms of the right **diet type** for the individual horse.

FAQs about low sugar and starch horse feed

What horse feed is lowest available in sugar and starch?

The most low-NSC options are usually forage-led feeds such as unmolassed chaff, a plain feed balancer, and fibre-based products built around beet pulp and other low NSC ingredients. The best choice depends on the horse's condition and workload, but low sugar horse feed is typically one with plenty of fibre, little or no molasses, and few cereals.

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Is a complete horse feed suitable for low sugar diets?

Yes, a complete horse feed can be suitable if the nutritional analysis shows low sugar and low starch levels. Each complete feed is different, so check the ingredients list and the digestible energy value. A low starch complete horse feed can be a convenient option for horses that need a balanced ration without extra supplements.

How do I know if my horse needs low starch feed?

Look at the horse's body condition score, temperament, and health history. Horses with laminitis risk, horses that become sharp on richer rations, and easy-keeping horses often benefit from low starch feed. If the horse needs controlled energy and stable gut health, a lower starch approach is often sensible.

Can I feed beet pulp as part of a low sugar horse diet?

Yes, beet pulp is commonly used in low sugar horse feeding because it is a fibre source rather than a cereal. It can be soaked and used in a mash or mixed with chaff and a balancer. It is especially useful when you want added energy without increasing starch too much.

What should I avoid when choosing horse feed for a horse prone to laminitis?

Avoid feeds high in sugar and starch, especially cereal-heavy products that can cause starch overload. Also avoid sudden changes, overfeeding, and ration plans that ignore forage. For a horse prone to laminitis, the safest approach is usually a forage-based diet with low NSC horse feed, careful feeding rate control, and regular monitoring.