

What is a forage-based diet for horses?

A **forage-based diet** is one where the bulk of daily intake comes from roughage such as **hay**, **haylage** or **grazing**. For many horses, forage needs to be the core of the diet because it promotes intestinal function, supplies steady **digestible fibre**, and helps maintain natural feeding behavior. This method follows **forage-first feeding**, which aims to provide most of the horse's nutritional need as possible from fiber sources prior to supplying any additional horse feed.

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The practical advantage is that forage gives a horse an outlet to chew for extended periods, which may support salivation and digestive function. This matters because the horse's digestive system is built for almost continuous consumption of forage. A forage-led diet often deliver steadier **energy density** than concentrated rations, which can help for horses that do not need many of extra calories.

That said, forage is not always nutritionally complete on its own. Quality of hay, haylage, and grazing may vary a great deal, affecting **nutrient balance**, **vitamins and minerals**, and total **calorie intake**. This is why two horses on a comparable forage-based diet can need different amounts of horse feed, or not any at all.

When does a horse need feed beyond forage?

Additional **horse feed** becomes useful when forage alone does not meet the horse's **energy requirements**, nutrient needs, or condition goals. The clearest sign is a mismatch between what the horse is eating and how it looks or performs. At this point **body condition score** and **workload** become the most useful decision tools.

A horse in light work with good-quality hay and a healthy body condition may need little more than a **balancer** or a small top-up. By contrast, a horse in harder work, growing horses, older horses with poorer teeth, or horses with low appetite may need additional calories and nutrients from carefully chosen feed. The aim is not to add feed automatically, but to match the ration to the horse's real needs.

Watch for these practical indicators:

- If weight is dropping, forage intake may be too low or too poor in quality.
- If the horse is becoming too fat, the issue may be excess calories from forage, hard feed, or both.
- If the horse is working harder, **performance needs** rise and forage alone may no longer be enough.
- If there are coat, muscle, or recovery concerns, the ration may lack key nutrients even if the horse looks well.

To summarize, horse feed is needed when forage no longer fully covers the horse's **nutritional needs** for health, condition, and activity.

Types of horse feed to use with forage

There are several **types of horse feed** that can be paired with forage, and picking the best one depends on the horse's condition, workload, and digestive tolerance. The main options include a **complete horse feed**, a **balancer**, and standard **concentrates**.

A **complete horse feed** is created to provide roughage, energy, vitamins and minerals in one product. It can be useful for owners who want a simple daily ration in a feed bucket without having to build multiple layers of supplements. Many complete feeds are formulated to be **low starch**, which may suit horses that are sensitive to high cereal levels.

A **balancer**, also called a **ration balancer**, is a concentrated nutrient source rather than a high-calorie feed. It is ideal for horses on good forage who need vitamins and minerals, quality protein, and support for nutrient balance without extra bulk or much energy. This can be especially useful for easy keepers.

Concentrates are more energy-rich feeds that often provide additional energy for horses with higher workload or greater calorie demand. They can be appropriate when forage quality or quantity is not enough, but they should be used carefully because of their higher starch or overall energy load.

The best option depends on the horse, not the label. For some horses, a balancer and forage are enough. For others, a complete feed is simpler. For higher demands, concentrates may be needed, but they should still sit within a forage-led plan.

How to choose horse feed for those just starting

When it comes to **horse feed for beginners**, a practical first step is to prioritise forage, then choose feed based on **digestibility**, **fibre**, and **starch** levels. Many beginners make feeding more complicated than it needs to be, but the most reliable method is to start with the horse's body condition, work level, and forage quality.

Highly digestible feed can help the horse use nutrients more efficiently, which is useful if the horse has a modest appetite or needs a calm source of energy. Fibre needs to be the foundation of the diet because it supports gut health and offers slower-release calories. This is why many modern feeds focus on fibre-based formulations rather than cereal-heavy mixes.

Watch starch. High-starch feeds can deliver quick energy, but they are not always the best fit for every horse, particularly those prone to sharp behaviour, digestive upset, or weight gain. Low-starch options are often easier to fit into a forage-first feeding plan.

When in doubt, choose the least complicated ration that meets the horse's needs: good forage, a sensible balancer if required, and only enough extra feed to support condition and work.

Rules for horse feeding every owner should observe

Effective **horse feeding rules** are simple, consistent, and centered on the horse's gut function. The aim behind the **10 rules of feeding horses** is not rigid perfection, but practical habits that minimize risk and promote wellbeing.

- Base the ration on roughage first.
- Use **ad-lib forage** where appropriate and safe for the horse's condition.
- Feed **small meals** rather than heavy bucket feeds.
- Apply any change gradually.
- Adjust feed to **body condition score** and **workload**.
- Make sure clean water is always available.
- Keep feeding times regular.
- Avoid sudden increases in **starch**.

- Check dung, appetite, coat, and weight regularly.
- Reassess the ration whenever the horse's work or forage quality changes.

These rules encourage gut health and reduce the chance of digestive upset. They also help owners prevent feeding by habit rather than need. In a forage-based diet, the ration should be steady, intentional, and easy for the horse to process.

How much horse feed should you provide?

There [overweight horse feed](#) is not a fixed answer to how much **horse feed** a horse should have, because the right amount depends on **bodyweight**, forage intake, condition, and activity. A **horse feeding chart** can help provide a starting point, but it should not replace careful monitoring of the individual horse.

A **horse feed calculator uk** can be useful for setting a daily ration, especially when you need to work from **bodyweight** and estimate energy needs. It can help you determine whether the horse is likely to need only forage, a balancer, or a more substantial feed. Even so, calculators are resources, not final answers. They are only as good as the information entered, especially if forage analysis or accurate weight estimates are missing.

Forage intake matters just as much as bagged feed. A horse eating enough hay or grazing may need very little additional energy. Another horse on limited forage may need a carefully measured horse feed top-up to avoid falling short on calories and nutrients. This is why many owners find it helpful to review the ration in stages: first forage, then nutrient balance, then extra calories if needed.

If you are unsure, assess the horse's current body condition, estimate forage intake, and then add feed only to fill the gap. That approach prevents overfeeding and keeps the ration aligned with the horse's actual needs.

What makes a complete horse feed?

A **complete horse feed** is a ration designed to deliver more than only calories. It usually contains **minerals and vitamins**, a **fibre source**, and a balanced energy profile, often with **low starch** levels relative to traditional cereal-heavy feeds. It is intended to make easier the ration by bringing together several parts into one product.

For numerous owners, the draw of a fully balanced feed is ease. It can suit many cases when you need to feed from a one bucket without adding additional supplements. The fibre source helps support gut performance, while the vitamins and minerals are designed to close frequent nutrient gaps in a forage-based diet.

That being said, fully balanced does not always mean ideal for every horse. The diet still needs to match the horse's **energy requirements**, digestibility needs, and appetite. A horse that performs well on forage and a balancer may not need a complete feed at all. Another horse with a higher workload may gain from one if it supplies sufficient calories without too much starch.

Horse feed cost: what influences the price?

Horse feed cost differs because not all feeds are made alike. The main factors are **ingredient quality**, formulation style, production, brand positioning, and **bag size**. More advanced feeds may cost more because they use selected ingredients or extra nutritional support.

Horse feed companies often price products based on the level of nutritional concentration and the daily amount needed. A feed with a greater feed rate may appear cheaper per bag, but the true daily cost may be higher. A more concentrated balancer or complete feed may seem expensive to begin with, yet lower daily quantities can make it economical overall.

Ingredient quality is important because it affects digestive efficiency, taste acceptance, and nutrient delivery. If a feed is designed for better fibre digestion or reduced starch, that can influence the price. Bag size also changes the comparison: bulk bags may reduce the cost per kilo, but only if the horse will use the product before it goes stale or becomes less practical.

To compare value properly, think in daily feed terms, not just bag price.

horse feed guidance: matching ration to fitness and workload

Effective **horse feed advice uk** opens with **condition scoring**. Once you know whether the horse is lean, ideal, or carrying extra weight, it becomes much easier to decide whether to increase or decrease the ration. Pair this with workload and you can build a much more reliable feeding plan.

A **performance horse** usually needs more energy, better nutrient support, and sometimes a feed with greater calorie density than a leisure horse. However, not every performance horse needs a high level of concentrates. Some do well on good-quality forage, a balancer, and a modest extra ration that supports recovery and work without making the horse too keen.

An **easy keeper** is the other challenge. These horses often maintain condition well, sometimes very easily, on relatively little feed. They usually need restricted energy but still require balanced nutrients. In these cases, a balancer and controlled forage may be more suitable than calorie-heavy feed.

What matters most is to match feed to the horse's current state rather than its type or reputation. Condition scoring, workload, and forage quality are more useful than guesswork.

How to make a simple horse feed mix recipe

A practical **horse feed mix recipe** does not need to be complex. Start with forage, then add ingredients that serve a clear purpose. A simple mix might include **beet pulp** for digestible fibre, **oils** for extra calories, and a **supplement** if the rest of the ration is short on vitamins or minerals.

Beet pulp is useful because it boosts fibre and can support safe calorie intake without relying heavily on starch. Oils can increase energy density without adding a large volume of feed, which is helpful for horses that need condition without a big bucket feed. A supplement may be needed if the forage and basic mix do not provide the full nutrient balance.

The most suitable straightforward recipe is one that the horse accepts readily, processes efficiently, and can stay on consistently. You are seeking palatability, intestinal health, and steady energy rather than a lengthy list of ingredients. Make changes gradually and track how the horse responds as time passes.

Popular brands and horse feed companies to compare

When comparing **horse feed companies**, prioritize product **specification** rather than marketing language. Different manufacturers may offer similar feeding goals but with different ingredient profiles, feed rates, and nutrient concentrations. A strong **brand range** provides options for different conditions and workloads.

For example, **spillers horse feed** is one of several brands that many owners evaluate when looking for structured feeding options. What matters is whether a product in the range matches the horse's forage-led ration, supports the right energy level, and supplies the right nutrient profile. A brand may offer balancers, complete feeds, and concentrates, but the best choice depends on what your horse really needs.

Always compare:

- What type of horse the feed is designed for.
- The likely daily **feed rate**.
- Whether it is high in fibre or high in starch.
- How well it fits the horse's current forage and workload.

A broad brand range is helpful, but the best decision comes from matching specification to the horse, not choosing by name alone.

Common feeding mistakes on forage-based diets

One of the biggest errors is **overfeeding concentrates**. Concentrates can be useful, but too much can upset the balance of a forage-led ration and create unnecessary calorie overload. Another common issue is failing to adjust feed when forage quality changes. If hay becomes poorer or haylage varies, the ration may no longer meet the horse's needs.

Sudden changes are another problem. **Sudden diet changes** can disrupt gut function and should always be avoided. Horses need gradual transitions so the digestive system can adapt safely. This is especially important when changing forage, adding a new balancer, or increasing a concentrate feed.

Incorrect feeding practices can result in serious health issues. High starch levels or imbalanced rations may make more likely **laminitis** in susceptible horses. Too large or badly managed meals can also contribute to **colic**. A careful feeding routine, steady forage consumption, and careful use of horse feed help reduce those risks.

Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

The **what should i feed my horse quiz** below is a basic decision guide rather than a formal test. Use it to narrow down the right approach based on **work level**, **forage quality**, and **nutritional needs**.

- **Is the horse in low work and keeping condition well?** When yes, hay with a balancer may be enough.
- **Is the forage good quality and the horse's body condition stable?** If so, extra feed may be minimal.
- **Is the horse losing weight or lacking topline?** When yes, you may need extra calories or a more balanced ration.
- **Is the horse doing harder work?** If yes, consider a feed with higher energy support.
- **Is the horse an easy keeper?** If so, avoid unnecessary concentrates and focus on nutrient balance.

If your answers lead in different directions, start with forage analysis if possible, then use a balancer or complete feed before moving to richer options. That is the best practical way to match the ration to actual need.

How to feed a horse in games vs real life

Searches like **how to feed a horse minecraft** often mix with real feeding questions, but **game mechanics** are not the same as **real horse nutrition**. In games, feeding is usually simplified into an action or item interaction. In real life, feeding is about gut health, energy balance, and long-term welfare.

That difference matters because **feeding myths** can spread easily. For example, some people assume that more feed always means more energy, or that all horses need cereal-based rations. In reality, many horses do better on

a forage-first approach with only light supplementation. A horse's daily ration should be based on forage quality, body condition, and workload, not on what seems to work in a game.

Real horse nutrition is also more nuanced because horses need regular fibre intake, careful management of starch, and careful focus to appetite and digestion. What looks simple in a game becomes a structured feeding plan in the stable.

FAQs about horse feed for forage-based diets

What horse feed should I use on a forage-based diet?

Start with forage as the primary part of the ration, then decide whether the horse needs a balancer, a complete horse feed, or a concentrate. The best choice depends on body condition, workload, and forage quality. For many horses, a balancer is enough if the forage is good and calories are not lacking.

How much horse feed does a horse need with good forage?

It depends on bodyweight, condition, and work. If the horse is maintaining weight well on good forage, it may need only a small amount extra horse feed, sometimes only a balancer. A horse feed calculator uk or a horse feeding chart can help estimate a first estimate, but you should adjust based on condition scoring and actual forage intake.

Is a complete horse feed better than a balancer?

Not always. A complete horse feed can be useful if you want a single product that includes vitamins and minerals, fibre, and low starch energy. A balancer is often better for easy keepers or horses that already get enough calories from forage, because it supports nutrient balance without adding much energy.

How do I use a horse feed calculator UK to set a ration?

Enter the horse's bodyweight, workload, and any known forage details to estimate daily ration needs. Use the result as a guide, then check the horse's body condition score and forage intake. The calculator helps you decide whether to stop at forage plus balancer or move to a more substantial feed, but it should not take the place of observation.

What are the main horse feeding rules for forage-based diets?

The main horse feeding rules are to keep forage as the base, use ad-lib forage where suitable, feed small meals, avoid sudden diet changes, and match the ration to workload and condition. Good feeding also means [low-sugar horse feed](#) monitoring for signs of colic or laminitis risk, keeping the ration consistent, and adjusting it when the horse's needs change.