

What is horse feed?

Horse feed is the broad term for anything designed to support equine [low calorie horse feed](#) nutrition beyond basic forage. It can include *nutritional concentrates*, *blended feed*, balancers, cubes, mixes, and even specific supplements designed to complement a roughage-based diet. The aim is to provide a properly balanced diet with the right mix of energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, and fibre for the horse's age, workload, temperament, and body condition.

At its core, horse feed is about maintaining the digestive system without taxing it. Most horses should get the majority of their intake from **forage** such as **hay** or **haylage**, because forage helps support gut health and encourages steady forage intake. Feed is then used to add nutrients that may be missing from forage alone.

There are many types of horse feed, and each serves a distinct purpose. Some are made for leisure horses needing maintenance energy, while others suit performance horses, poor doers, natives on restricted grazing, or older horses that need extra digestibility and palatability. A **complete horse feed** is one that can deliver the necessary nutrition on its own, usually alongside access to forage and water, depending on the product's feeding rate and guidance on the feed label.

Understanding horse feed means looking beyond the name on the bag. The ingredients, nutrients, starch level, fibre content, protein, vitamins, and minerals all matter. A feed with less starch and higher fibre may be better for some horses, while a more energy-dense ration may suit horses in heavier work. In other words, horse feed is not one single product, but a category of feeding options.

What are pelleted feeds in horse nutrition?

This feed format are a physical form of horse feed rather than a different nutritional category. They are made by milling ingredients and forming them into small, uniform shapes. Pellet feeds can be designed as a balanced horse feed, a balancer, or a supplement-style product depending on the formulation.

In horse nutrition, pellets are common because they are easy to measure, quick to mix with other feed, and often more uniform from batch to batch than textured mixes. They may be based on fibre, cereals, protein sources, vitamins, and minerals, with the exact ingredients varying by brand and intended use. Because the particles are compressed, some horses find them more manageable to chew and less messy to eat.

Pellets can be useful for owners who want a straightforward feeding routine and clear portion control. They can also improve palatability for some horses, especially when compared with plain chaff or straights. However, not all pellets are identical. Some are high-fibre and forage-based, while others are more concentrated and may include more starch or added energy for harder-working horses.

It is important not to assume that all pellets are automatically complete horse feed. Some are complete, some are designed as a supplement, and some must be fed with other components to create a balanced ration. The feed label is the key to understanding whether pellets can stand alone or should be combined with forage and another mix. In practice, pellets are simply one style among many types of horse feed.

Horse feed vs pellet feed: what's the difference?

The basic distinction is that **horse feed** is the overall term, while **pellets** are a single presentation in that category. Simply put, all pellets can be horse feed if they are made for horses, but not all horse feed is pellets. Horse feed can also come as a mix, cube, mash, balancer, or compound feed.

Think of it like this: horse feed describes the nutritional purpose, while pellets describe the shape and presentation. A feed mix may contain flakes, cereals, and chopped fibre, whereas pellets are pressed and uniform. The shape affects feeding management, storage, and sometimes digestibility, but the real difference lies in ingredients and formulation.

For example, one complete horse feed may be a high-fibre pellet designed for good gut health and controlled energy. Another may be a molassed mix with cereals and added vitamins for horses needing more energy. Both are horse feed, but only one is pellets. This is why checking the feed label is so important.

Pellets may also be used in different types of horse feed depending on the horse's needs. A performance feed may use pellets to deliver protein and minerals efficiently, while a maintenance feed might use pellets with lower starch and higher fibre. If you want a simple horse feed mix recipe, pellets can be one part of it, combined with forage, chaff, or a supplement as advised. But the recipe should always be based on the horse's ration and workload, not just convenience.

So, the difference is not "horse feed versus pellets" as if they were opposites. Rather, pellets are one way horse feed is manufactured and delivered. The best choice depends on digestibility, palatability, fibre content, starch level, and how well the product fits the horse's nutritional requirements.

Which is better for your horse: feed or pellets?

No option is always superior. The right choice depends on the horse, the workload, body condition, forage intake, and feeding goals. Good horse feeding rules always start with forage first, then consider whether a concentrate, compound feed, or pellet is needed to balance the diet.

A horse with a healthy body condition and light workload may do well on forage, with a small amount of low-starch horse feed if needed. A horse in harder work may need more energy and nutrients, which could come from a high-quality complete horse feed in pellet or mix form. Older horses, poor doers, and horses with dental issues may benefit from a more digestible pellet or a soaked feed that is easy to chew.

Use a horse feeding chart as a guide, but treat it as a starting point rather than a rigid rule. Feeding should always reflect the individual horse's body condition, temperament, and exercise level. Some horses are highly excitable and may not suit highly cereal-based feeds, while others need more readily available energy. A forage-first plan with a suitable supplement can often provide better feed management than overfeeding concentrates.

If you are unsure, look for horse feed advice UK owners can trust, ideally from a qualified nutritionist, vet, or experienced yard manager. Their recommendation should be based on the horse's digestive system, current ration, and what is already available from hay, haylage, and grazing.

In short, pellets can be better when you want consistency, easier portioning, and clean feeding. Mixed feeds may be better when palatability and variety matter. The best decision comes from matching the feed to the horse rather than choosing by format alone.

How much horse feed should you offer?

How much horse feed you should offer depends on body weight, exercise load, forage quality, and the horse's body condition. A horse feed calculator UK tool can aid work out a starter amount, but it should be used alongside a proper horse feeding chart and common sense. Horses are designed to eat forage steadily, so feed should support the diet rather than dominate it.

For horse feed for beginners, the simplest rule is to feed according to need, not custom. Start by assessing how much hay or haylage the horse is already eating, then decide whether extra energy, protein, vitamins, or minerals are required. A horse in light work may need a light ration or a balancer, while a horse in more intense work may need a bigger concentrate ration split into several meals.

Horse feeding rules generally suggest avoiding large meals of concentrate, because overloading the digestive system can upset gut health. Instead, divide feed into smaller portions through the day. This is especially important if the ration includes starch, as too much at once may affect the gut and behaviour.

Use the horse's body condition and workload to adjust feeding over time. If the condition score is too low, the horse may need more digestible calories and nutrients. If the horse is gaining too much weight, reduce rich feeds and lean more heavily on forage and lighter options. A horse feed calculator UK can support these decisions, but it cannot replace observation.

Always check the feed label for suggested feeding amount, as even complete horse feed should be fed within manufacturer guidance. The right ration is about equilibrium, not volume. More feed is not always better.

How much is horse feed?

The cost of horse feed varies widely because raw materials, formulation, and brand quality all influence price. If you're wondering **what horse feed costs**, the honest answer is that it depends on whether you are buying a simple balancer, a complete horse feed, a high-performance ration, or a specialist product for health or performance.

Some horse feed companies focus on budget-friendly maintenance feeds, while others produce premium formulas with higher digestibility, specific fibre sources, or precisely balanced vitamins and minerals. Premium feeds may cost more per bag, but a lower feeding rate can sometimes make the daily cost more reasonable than it first appears.

Spillers horse feed is a good example of a widely recognised brand with different products for different needs. Like other horse feed companies, it offers feeds for hobby horses, competition horses, and horses requiring special nutritional support. Comparing products only by bag price can be misleading, because the true cost depends on the daily ration and the nutrients provided.

When estimating horse feed cost, consider:

- the horse size and how much it eats
- the feeding rate on the feed label
- how much forage the horse already receives
- whether it is a complete horse feed or a supplement
- how much of the bag is needed each week

For practical budgeting, it helps to compare cost per day rather than cost per bag. A feed that looks expensive may work out better value if it provides more nutrition in a smaller ration. This is especially true when feeding horses with specific requirements such as increased protein, improved fibre, or carefully controlled starch.

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Types of horse feed and when to use them

There are a number of types of horse feed, and each has a place in feed management. The best choice depends on whether the horse needs more energy, improved fibre, better body condition, or a simple supplement to a forage-based diet.

- **Complete horse feed** - Created to supply a full nutritional package, often including vitamins, minerals, protein, and energy. Ideal when you need a straightforward ration alongside forage.
- **Concentrates** - Highly concentrated feeds that help horses with higher workload or greater calorie needs. These may contain more starch and should be fed carefully.
- **Compound feed** - A mixed feed made from several ingredients, often with added nutrients for balanced nutrition.
- **Pellets** - A compressed feed form that can be complete or supplementary, depending on formulation.
- **Forage-based feeds** - Fibre-rich products that support gut health and suit horses needing lower starch.
- **Supplements** - Used to top up specific nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, or amino acids when forage and main feed are not enough.

When deciding which to use, assess the horse's workload, temperament, and condition score. Horses that become excitable on cereal-based rations may do better with a higher-fibre product. Horses that struggle to keep weight may need more digestible calories, protein, and oil. The point is to match nutrients to need rather than chasing a label.

Many horse feed companies offer a full range, including products from **Spillers horse feed** and other established brands. These ranges often include complete horse feed, balancers, cubes, and pellets. Choosing between them means understanding ingredients and the role each feed plays in the ration. A good product should support health, palatability, and consistent intake without compromising the digestive system.

10 essential rules of feeding horses every owner should know

These horse feeding rules are a practical foundation for everyday feed management. They are especially helpful if you are using horse feed for beginners guidance or comparing different types of horse feed.

- 1. Make forage the base of the diet, using hay or haylage as appropriate.
- 2. Feed based on body condition, not just habit.
- 3. Match the ration to workload and temperament.
- 4. Inspect the feed label for ingredients, nutrients, and feeding rate.
- 5. Keep starch levels appropriate for the horse's digestive system and behaviour.
- 6. Prioritise fibre for gut health and steady energy.
- 7. Divide concentrates into smaller meals where possible.
- 8. Offer constant access to clean water.
- 9. Use a horse feeding chart as a starting point, then adjust for the individual horse.
- 10. Review the ration regularly as condition score, season, and workload vary.

These horse feeding rules are not about strict perfection. They are about consistency and practical feed management. A horse feeding chart can help you estimate the right ration, but no chart can replace observation. If the horse is losing weight, gaining too much, or showing signs of poor digestibility, the diet should be reviewed.

Good horse feed advice UK owners often receive follows the same principle: start with forage, then add only what is needed. This protects the digestive system, supports balanced nutrition, and reduces waste. It also helps owners avoid overfeeding a horse simply because a product looks appealing or is heavily marketed.

FAQs about horse feed and pellets

Are horse feed and pellets the same?

No. Horse feed is the broader category, while pellets are one form of horse feed. Pellets may form part of a complete horse feed, but they can also be a supplement or a specific ingredient-based product. The feed label is what shows whether the pellets are complete or need to be fed with something else.

What is the difference between complete horse feed and pellets?

Complete horse feed is a feed product made to supply the necessary nutrients in the correct balance, usually alongside forage. Pellets just refer to the feed format. A complete horse feed can come as pellets, cubes, or a mix. Not all pellets are complete horse feed, so you need to check the formulation and feeding instructions.

How do I know how much horse feed my horse needs?

Use a horse feeding chart and a horse feed calculator UK tool as starting points, then adjust based on body condition, workload, forage intake, and temperament. The horse's condition score is a very useful guide. If you are unsure, seek horse feed advice UK owners rely on from a vet, nutritionist, or experienced professional.

How much can horse feed cost on average?

Horse feed cost varies by brand, ingredients, and feeding rate. There is no single average that works for every horse, because a small daily ration of a premium complete horse feed may cost less in practice than a larger amount of a cheaper concentrate. To work out how much does horse feed cost for your horse, assess the daily ration rather than the bag price alone.

What is best to feed my horse as a beginner owner?

For horse feed for beginners, start with forage as the foundation and only add a concentrate or complete horse feed if the horse truly needs it. Select a basic formula, forage-based if possible, and match it to the horse's workload and condition score. If you are unsure, use a horse feeding chart and seek horse feed advice UK professionals can provide before making major changes.