

Horse Management Tips for Cooling Temperatures and Extending the Grazing Season

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As the weather begins to cool, horse owners should start to shift gears in terms of how they care for their horses. For instance, the amount you feed your horse may change, depending on how much grazing is available to your horses. We have been fortunate this year to enjoy ample amounts of rain for the majority of the state. This has allowed for greener pastures with greater amounts of grazing capabilities.

However, with the cooling temperatures we are certain to experience; grass will soon be fading away for the next few months. Hopefully, in anticipating this change, you have been purchasing hay to subsidize for this lack of grazing and possibly increasing or adding a concentrate to your horse's diet. In speaking about my own feeding program, we have had ample amounts of pasture to graze of the last several months, allowing us to not need to feed any hay and only small amounts of a concentrate to the older horses. Knowing that grass would soon become limited, we have purchased hay to begin feeding, probably in December. However, there are ways to lengthen the grazing season. The University of Arkansas has utilized and promoted the 300 Days Grazing Program for several years. This program has traditionally been directed to cattle producers. Recently, horse owners have begun to inquire about how they can stretch their grazing season to help cut costs of feeding hay. Over the next several months, trial grazing projects will be employed to determine methods for stretching the grazing season as long as possible. The results of these projects will be published and made available to horse owners across the state. In the meantime, here are a few considerations and methods of stretching the grazing season:

- Consider rotational grazing. Move your horses around several times throughout the year to allow the pastures to grow to their full potential.
- Employ weed control practices. Contact your county extension agent to determine the best product to spray your pastures with to maintain weed control.
- Brush hog if possible. One of the best and easiest management practices is to keep your pasture mowed during the growing season. This will also help control weeds.
- Avoid overgrazing. Too many horses in a small pasture can cause not only keep your horses from getting the proper amounts of forage, but can also damage the pasture.
- Utilize fertilizers. Horse pastures can be fertilized to maximize growth. Similar to weed control, contact your county extension agent to formulate a plan of action.

Visit your local coop or contact your county extension agent to help you formulate a plan for pasture management that can begin even during the fall or winter.

To help your horse be healthier during colder months:

- Hay keeps horses warm, not concentrates. Horses are able to save energy needed to produce body heat by consuming hay. Shop around to find the highest quality hay possible for your horses. Also, ask if hay has been tested and what the results were.
- If hay is in short supply, consider integrating alternative forage sources--such as hay cubes, beet pulp, and complete feeds--to help stretch the forage supply.
- Round bales are fine to feed horses. Feeding all at once will work, but much of the hay is wasted. Consider feeding small amounts at each feeding. This can be accomplished by peeling hay off with a pitchfork and tossing over the fence or keeping the round bale in a separate pen and allowing horses to only eat on the bale for short amounts of time.
- Monitor your horses' water intake. During colder temperatures, horses tend to drink less water, thus making dehydration a concern. Ensure that your horse's water is always made available and never froze.
- Also consider adding electrolytes and/or warmer water to encourage drinking. It is a good practice to provide a second water bucket in case the animal won't drink the flavored electrolyte water.
- When hauling your horse during cooler months, if possible take water from home to offer horse when possible.

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