

Winter Warmers for Horses

The days are getting shorter, the temperature is dropping and no doubt as the Townies go into hibernation until the spring, those of us who own livestock and, specifically for this article, horses should know that this is time of the year where we get covered in mud, endure the frosts and icy water and spend many an hour in the dark caring for our beloved four legged friends.

While this is often the time of year where horses are rested, it certainly should not be a time where they are neglected. In fact it is often more important during this time to be keeping a good eye on your horses health and wellbeing. Below are some general tips to ensure your horse comes through winter ready for the new season.

Living Quarters: Whether your horse is stabled or out in the paddock over the winter time you need to ensure that they have appropriate shelter from the prevailing winds and rain and are kept in the driest paddock possible, to try and avoid foot problems and mud fever. A really important tip for this time of year is to make sure that any creeks, dams or really boggy areas are taped off.

Body Temperature: Having the appropriate shelter for your horse is usually enough to help them maintain a good body temperature throughout the winter times. Those horses used to not having covers on will certainly grow a nice winter coat to keep themselves warm. If you are covering your horse, make sure it is waterproof and fits really well. It is often better to have no cover than a heavy sodden one. For those of you continuing to ride throughout the winter it would be worth considering having your horse clipped so that he or she is never put back in the paddock wet. If you are going to clip make sure you purchase a nice, snug waterproof rug.

Hoof care: It is usually a debate as to whether to remove shoes for the winter or leave them on. This is really an individual horse decision, as some horses just do not do well without their shoes, whereas others are fine. Either way it is important that your farrier still comes on a regular basis. Even though hoof growth at this time of year is slower there are a number of problems that can occur such as abscesses, thrush and bacterial infections. A good farrier will notice these problems and treat them before they turn into something nasty.

Nutrition: This is also a very individual topic, every horse is different, but it is important to note that the grass composition at this time of year is different with energy, mineral and vitamin content. It is often necessary to increase the amount of energy that your horse is eating; hay is a good choice depending on your horses needs.



If you are concerned about how your horse's condition is looking or just wanting to optimise your nutrition regime through winter it would be worth consulting your vet and perhaps even having some blood tests run.

Teeth are important at this time of year to ensure that maximum intake of the available grass is occurring. It is generally recommended to have your horses teeth checked at least once a year and certainly if it has been longer than this, now is the perfect time to have an equine dentist do a check.

Worming is still important throughout the winter period. If you are unsure of what kind of worming your horse needs, consult with your vet for a helping hand.

General Checks: You should be checking your horses on a daily basis, or at least finding someone who can. It is important, even if you are not riding, to take the covers off; do a good general check; pick out the feet and ensure everything is ok and as it should be!

Article supplied by Dr Rebecca Penman.
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