

What Grass-Free Feeding Means for Horses

Grass-free feeding refers to planning a horse's diet without regular access to grazing, so the ration must supply everything the horse would normally get from pasture. That shifts the role of **horse feed** from a simple top-up to the main source of nutrients, energy, and often a significant amount of fibre. In practical terms, the diet has to work as a **replacement forage** or, at minimum, a dependable **forage stand-in** alongside hay, haylage, or other conserved fibre.

A grass-free setup may work for horses in stabled management, horses on restricted grazing, or horses that [overweight horse feed](#) need tighter control of calorie intake and bodyweight. The key is not simply to "feed more", but to formulate a **balanced ration** that supports the **digestive tract**, maintains **intestinal health**, and delivers enough **protein**, **roughage**, **key micronutrients**, and suitable **energy supply** for the horse's workload and condition.

Because grass normally contributes to a **forage-led diet**, removing it means the rest of the ration must be more carefully planned. The most important consideration is whether the horse needs maintenance, conditioning, or performance support. A good grass-free plan should aim for steady **feed balance**, stable **daily calories**, and feed that is appropriate for the horse's **body condition**, temperament, and digestive sensitivity.

Types of Horse Feed to Feed Without Grass

There are **types of horse feed** that may be used in no-grass feeding, but they are not directly interchangeable. Certain options are designed to provide the bulk of the daily ration, while others act as **supplementary feed** to support a forage-heavy diet. Selecting the right option depends on how much conserved forage the horse eats, how much energy it needs, and whether you want a reduced-starch or energy-dense approach.

A **complete horse feed** is one of the best solutions when grass is absent. It is created to provide fibre, calories, nutrients, and vitamins and minerals in a single product, although it still is generally most effective alongside hay or wrapped forage. A complete feed can be beneficial for horses that struggle with chewing long fibre, older horses, or owners looking for a simpler feeding routine with less separate parts.

A **compound feed** is a more general term for dietary blends combined from cereals, fiber sources, protein components, and added minerals. Certain compound feeds are created for performance, others for recreational horses, and others for good-doers. They can be helpful where a horse needs more targeted support for conditioning or work, but the **nutritional specification** should always be examined closely.

Chaff is an additional valuable part of pasture-free feeding. It increases chewing duration, assists moderate intake, and can enhance palatability when mixed with other ingredients. Chaff is especially beneficial for horses that need a slower eating pace or a bit more volume without too much starch. It can also promote saliva production, which is helpful for digestive comfort.

Other popular options consist of **balancer** feeds, which deliver dense vitamins, minerals, and amino acids with limited calories, and fibre-based feeds such as **fibre cubes**. For some horses, especially those on restricted diets, a balancer plus forage and a small amount of chaff may be adequate. In other cases, a more robust feed is needed. The ideal choice depends on training load, body condition, and the ration's overall nutrient content.

How to Build a Carefully Balanced Grass-Free Ration

Developing a grass-free ration starts with the basics: forage first in its conserved form, then concentrates or balancers only as needed. Good **horse feeding rules** always keep fibre at the centre of the diet, because the horse's gut is designed for near-constant intake of roughage. Even without grass, the aim should be to support the digestive tract working steadily with regular fibre meals and sensible feed rate control.

A practical way to plan the ration is to use a **horse feeding chart** as a guide for bodyweight, condition, and workload. Charts are useful for broad planning, but they do not replace observation. Every horse has individual **daily requirements**, and those needs change with age, season, workload, and metabolism. A horse in light work may need far less concentrate than a horse in conditioning or active training.

A **horse feed calculator uk** [starch reduced horse feed](#) tool can help work out the amount of feed and forage needed, especially when working out total energy and nutrient intake. It is a useful first step for assessing feed rate and identifying whether the horse is underfed, overfed, or receiving too much sugar and starch. However, calculator results should always be checked against the horse's body condition score and actual health.

Digestible fibre is especially important in grass-free feeding. Fibre is not just "bulk"; it is an important energy source for many horses and supports stable gut function. If the ration is based on hay, haylage, alfalfa, beet pulp, chaff, or fibre cubes, the horse can still receive adequate fuel without relying heavily on cereal-based feeds. This is often preferable for horses needing calmer behaviour, better digestive comfort, or lower starch intake.

A well-built ration should consider the following:

- Conserved forage as the foundation of the diet
- Whether a complete horse feed is needed or a balancer will do
- The horse's bodyweight and body condition score
- Workload, conditioning goals, and daily requirements
- Protein quality, vitamins and minerals, and overall nutrient density
- The level of sugar and starch in the complete ration

The result should be a well-balanced ration that maintains energy, muscle maintenance, and gut health without creating unnecessary digestive stress.

Horse Feed for Beginners: What to Know First

Horse feed for beginners should be simple, consistent, and suited for the horse's individual needs. A lot of new owners worry about choosing the "best" feed, but the first step is always understanding the horse in front of you. A sound feeding plan is based on condition score, workload, age, and the quality of available forage, not on packaging claims alone.

Reliable **horse feed advice uk** sources tend to emphasise the same core point: start with forage, then add feed only to fill gaps. If a horse is maintaining condition well on hay and a balancer, there may be no real need for a richer compound feed. If the horse is losing weight, lacking energy, or needs more support for work, then a richer feed may be appropriate.

Body condition score is one of the most valuable tools for beginners. It helps you see whether a horse is too thin, ideal, or carrying too much weight. In grass-free feeding, this is especially important because a horse's calorie intake can rise quickly if feed choices are too rich. Routine scoring helps you adjust the ration before problems develop.

Feeding frequency also matters. Horses tend to do better with smaller, more frequent meals than with large concentrates in one go. This supports a more stable digestive system and can lower the risk of digestive upset.

For some horses, three or more daily feedings are ideal; for others, two may be enough if the ration is mainly forage-based and the horse is not in hard work.

Beginners should remember that horse feed should suit the horse, not the other way around. A calm cob, a poor-doing thoroughbred, and a veteran with dental issues may all need very different solutions. The safest approach is to make changes step by step and keep the ration predictable.

Assessing Horse Feed Companies and Well-Known Brands

Many **horse feed companies** providing forage-free feeding options, and the brand you choose often comes down to the feed's function rather than the logo on the sack. A good comparison begins with the **ingredient list**. That list shows whether the feed is primarily fibre focused, cereal-based, high in oil, or designed as a balancer or complete ration.

As an example, **spillers horse feed** is widely known for having a broad range of products for different types of horses, from balancers and fibre feeds to condition and performance options. So it serves as a useful example of how a brand may provide several feeding routes rather than one universal answer. When comparing any brand, look at whether the feed is suitable as a main ration, a partial ration, or a supplement.

Its **nutritional specification** is more important than marketing language. Check the stated levels of energy, protein, fibre, oil, starch, sugar, vitamins and minerals, and any added probiotics or prebiotics. These figures tell you how the feed supports conditioning, recovery, and gut health. A feed with good palatability but poor nutritional balance may tempt the horse without meeting its daily requirements.

Brand comparisons should also account for the horse's feeding style. Some feeds are highly palatable but more energy-dense, while others are designed to be lower in starch and better suited to a controlled ration. Ask whether the product is intended for maintenance, weight gain, topline support, or improved fibre intake. That keeps the choice practical and aligned with the horse's needs.

How Many Does Horse Feed Cost?

Horse feed cost changes widely depending on whether you are buying a balancer, a complete feed, a compound feed, or a specialist fibre product. When asking **how much does horse feed cost**, it is better to think in terms of daily feeding rate and overall ration cost rather than bag price alone. A cheaper bag may not be economical if the horse needs a big amount each day.

Budgeting for grass-free feeding should include forage, concentrates, and any extras such as balancers or supplements. A horse on a simple ration of hay plus balancer may cost less to feed than a horse needing a rich compound feed, but the total depends on bodyweight, condition, and workload. Calculating cost per day gives a much clearer picture of what the ration really costs.

The **daily feeding rate** is especially useful for comparison. If one feed is fed at 1 kg a day and another at 4 kg a day, the lower bag price may not be the cheaper option overall. It is also important to factor in wastage, storage, and whether the feed replaces part of the forage allowance or is only an addition.

For many horses, the most cost-effective ration is not the cheapest feed but the best match. A well-designed balanced ration can reduce waste, improve condition, and avoid overfeeding calories the horse does not need. That can save money in the long run and support better health.

Recipe for Horse Feed Mix: When to Make One and How

A **horse feed mix recipe** can be practical when you want to combine a few simple ingredients into a workable grass-free ration. It is most suitable when you understand the horse's needs and want a custom mix based on fiber, conditioning, and digestibility. For many horses, the core of the mix will be forage plus a **balancer**, with other ingredients added only if necessary.

A straightforward mix might include **oats** for faster energy, **fibre cubes** for digestible bulk, and chaff to improve chew time and palatability. This can suit some horses in light or moderate work, especially when additional calories are needed. However, oats are higher in starch, so they are not suitable for every horse, particularly those needing a low-starch ration.

When making a mix, the aim is not to create the most complex recipe, but the most suitable one. A fibre-led blend can often provide a better energy source for horses that need steady fuel rather than a sharp release. If the horse already gets a good balancer and enough forage, the mix may only need a small amount of cereal or conditioning feed.

Use custom mixes cautiously. Every ingredient changes the overall nutrient density, sugar and starch profile, and feed rate. If in doubt, simplify the ration rather than complicate it. The best horse feed mix recipe is the one that supports body condition, appetite, and digestive stability without drifting away from the horse's real requirements.

Common Feeding Pitfalls to Avoid

One of the most usual mistakes is neglecting the basic **horse feeding rules** and leaning too much on hard feed while not providing enough fibre. This can upset the digestive system and increase the risk of poor gut function. A forage-led approach remains the safest foundation, even when a horse is not on grass.

Sudden diet change is another significant risk. Any change to forage, compound feed, balancer, or fibre feed should be introduced slowly. Horses need time to get used to new ingredients and a different ration balance. Abrupt changes can affect appetite, manure quality, and overall comfort.

Colic is a major concern when feeding is poorly managed. While colic has many causes, unstable routines, too much starch, and low fibre intake can all add to digestive stress. Consistent feeding frequency, plenty of digestible fibre, and careful transitions help reduce risk.

Starch should be watched closely, especially in horses that become fizzy, reactive, or prone to digestive sensitivity. High-starch feeds can suit some working horses, but many do better with fibre-led nutrition and more measured energy release. Overdoing starch often causes more problems than it solves.

Other mistakes include:

- Selecting feed that does not match the horse's body condition score
- Buying a product without checking the ingredient list and nutritional specification
- Feeding too much too quickly instead of following sensible feed rate guidance
- Ignoring forage quality when planning the ration
- Thinking all complete feeds are interchangeable

Good feeding is consistent, controlled, and based on observation. That is the most straightforward route to better health and better results.

FAQ: Grass-Free Horse Feeding Questions

What horse feed is best for grass-free feeding?

The best horse feed depends on the horse's body condition, workload, and digestive sensitivity, but many horses do well on a roughage-based **complete horse feed** or a balancer plus forage. If the horse needs more calories, a compound feed or fibre-based conditioning feed may be more suitable. The ideal choice should support a balanced ration, good palatability, and stable gut health.

Is it possible for a horse to be fed completely on complete horse feed?

Certain horses can be kept primarily on complete horse feed, especially if they also receive appropriate forage and the product is made to fulfil daily requirements. However, most horses still do better from some hay or haylage because fibre remains essential to digestive function. A complete feed can be the primary concentrate, but it is not always a full substitute for long fibre.

How can I use a horse feed calculator UK tool?

A **horse feed calculator uk** tool is usually used by entering the horse's bodyweight, workload, and sometimes body condition score. It then works out feed and forage amounts and helps you decide whether the ration is too concentrated or too light. See it as a guide, then adjust based on the horse's condition, appetite, and performance.

What should I feed my horse if it has no access to grass?

If a horse has no access to grass, feed it a forage-led ration built around hay, haylage, or another suitable forage replacement. Add a balancer, complete horse feed, or compound feed only as needed to meet daily requirements. The aim is to provide highly digestible fibre, vitamins and minerals, and the right energy source without too much starch.

How much can horse feed cost per day?

Daily cost depends on the variety of horse feed, the feed rate, and how much forage the horse needs. A balancer-based diet may be low in daily cost, while a performance compound feed or conditioning ration can be more expensive. The most accurate way to judge horse feed cost is to total the full daily feeding rate, including forage and any supplementary feed.