

What is a forage-based diet for horses?

A **forage-based diet** is one where the bulk of the daily ration is made up of coarse feed including **hay**, **haylage** or **grazing**. For many horses, forage needs to be the foundation of feeding because it supports gut health, delivers consistent **digestible fibre**, and encourages normal eating patterns. This method reflects **forage-first feeding**, which aims to provide as much of its nutritional needs as possible from fibre sources before adding any extra horse feed.

The main advantage is that forage provides a horse something to chew for extended periods, which may support saliva flow and digestive function. This matters because the horse's digestive system is designed for near-continuous consumption of roughage. This type of diet also tends to deliver steadier **energy density** than highly concentrated feed, which can help for horses that require not many of supplemental energy.

But, forage is not always nutritionally complete alone. Quality of hay, haylage, and grazing varies a great deal, affecting **nutrient balance**, **vitamins and minerals**, and general **calorie intake**. For this reason two horses on a similar forage-based diet can need very different levels of horse feed, or none at all.

When does a horse benefit from feed beyond forage?

Additional **horse feed** becomes useful when forage alone does not meet the horse's **calorie requirements**, nutrient needs, or condition goals. The most obvious 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. On the other hand, a horse in harder work, growing horses, older horses with poorer teeth, or horses with low appetite [overweight horse feed](#) 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.

Consider these practical indicators:

- If the horse is getting lighter, 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 the horse has coat, muscle, or recovery issues, the ration may lack key nutrients even if the horse looks well.

In short, 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 various **types of horse feed** that can be combined with forage, and picking the most suitable 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 formulated to provide roughage, energy, vitamins and minerals in one product. It can be useful for owners who want a easy daily ration in a feed bucket without having to build several tiers 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.

Choosing horse feed for those just starting

For **horse feed for beginners**, the simplest approach 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 best approach is to start with the horse's body condition, work level, and forage quality.

A feed with good digestibility 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 ought to form the basis of the ration because it supports gut health and offers slower-release calories. For that reason many modern feeds focus on fibre-based formulations rather than cereal-heavy mixes.

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Keep an eye on 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.

Horse feeding guidelines every owner should observe

Good **horse feeding rules** are simple, steady, and designed for the horse's gut function. The idea behind the **10 rules of feeding horses** is not rigid perfection, but useful habits that reduce risk and improve health.

- Base the ration on grazing first.
- Use **ad-lib forage** where safe and safe for the horse's needs.
- Feed **small meals** rather than big bucket feeds.
- Apply any change step by step.
- Tailor feed to **body condition score** and **workload**.
- Ensure clean water is always available.
- Maintain feeding times regular.
- Prevent sudden increases in **starch**.
- Check dung, appetite, coat, and weight regularly.

- Check the ration whenever the horse's work or forage quality changes.

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

How much horse feed should you give?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer to how much **horse feed** a horse should have, because the appropriate amount depends on **bodyweight**, forage intake, condition, and activity. A **horse feeding chart** can help provide a starting point, but it should not replace regular assessment 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 identify whether the horse is likely to need only forage, a balancer, or a more substantial feed. Even so, calculators are tools, 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 defines a complete horse feed?

A **complete horse feed** is a feed designed to supply more than only calories. It usually contains **minerals and vitamins**, a **fibre source**, and a balanced energy profile, often with **low starch** levels compared with traditional cereal-based feeds. It is intended to streamline the ration by combining several parts into one product.

For many owners, the appeal of a complete feed is ease. It can suit many cases when you want to feed from a single tub without adding extra ingredients. The fiber source helps aid gut function, while the vitamins and minerals are designed to close frequent nutrient gaps in a hay-based diet.

Even so, comprehensive does not always mean best for every horse. The ration still needs to suit the horse's **energy requirements**, digestibility needs, and appetite. A horse that thrives on forage and a balancer may not need a complete feed at all. Another horse with a higher workload may do well on one if it supplies enough calories without too much starch.

Horse feed cost: what determines the price?

Horse feed cost fluctuates because not all feeds are made the same way. The main factors are **ingredient quality**, formulation style, production, brand positioning, and **bag size**. More specialised feeds may cost more because they use selected ingredients or added nutrient support.

Horse feed companies commonly cost products based on how concentrated the nutrition is and how much of the product is needed per day. A feed with a higher feed rate may appear cheaper per bag, but the real daily cost may be higher. A more dense balancer or complete feed may seem expensive at first, yet lower daily servings can make it cost-effective overall.

Component quality matters because it affects digestive efficiency, palatability, and nutrient availability. If a feed is designed for better fibre digestion or reduced starch, that can influence the price. Bag size also changes the comparison: bigger bags may decrease the cost per kilo, but only if the horse will use the product before it goes stale or becomes less practical.

To assess value properly, consider in daily feed terms, not just bag price.

Horse feed tips: aligning ration to fitness and activity

Practical **horse feed advice uk** starts with **condition scoring**. Once you know whether the horse is too thin, at a healthy weight, or overweight, it becomes much easier to decide whether to raise or cut the ration. Add this with workload and you can build a much more precise feeding plan.

A **performance horse** usually needs more energy, stronger nutritional support, and sometimes a feed with higher energy 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 small additional 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 better 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 create a simple horse feed mix recipe

A straightforward **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 adds fibre and can support safe calorie intake without relying heavily on starch. Oils can lift 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 deliver the full nutrient balance.

The most suitable basic recipe is one that the horse accepts readily, breaks down easily, and can keep up reliably. You are seeking easy acceptance, digestive health, and consistent energy rather than a long list of components. Keep adjustments minor and track how the horse responds over time.

Popular brands and horse feed companies to compare

When comparing **Browse around this site horse feed companies**, prioritize product **specification** rather than marketing language. Different brands 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 fits the horse's forage-led ration, supports the right energy level, and delivers the right nutrient profile. A brand may offer balancers, complete feeds, and concentrates, but the best choice depends on what your horse truly requires.

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 lead to serious health issues. Too much starch or poorly balanced rations may increase the risk of **laminitis** in susceptible horses. Overly large or poorly managed meals can also lead to **colic**. A careful feeding routine, steady forage consumption, and thoughtful use of horse feed 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 pinpoint the right approach based on **work level**, **forage quality**, and **nutritional needs**.

- **Is the horse in low work and keeping condition well?** When yes, roughage and a balancer may be enough.
- **Is the forage good quality and the horse's body condition stable?** When yes, extra feed may be minimal.
- **Is the horse losing weight or lacking topline?** When yes, you may need additional energy or a improved ration.
- **Is the horse doing harder work?** If so, consider a feed with greater calorie support.
- **Is the horse an easy keeper?** When yes, 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 most practical way to match the ration to true requirements.

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 a basic 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

forage-first feeding with only light supplementation. A horse's daily ration should be based on how good the forage is, 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 practical attention to appetite and digestion. What looks simple in a game becomes a more organized 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 main part of the ration, then consider 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 very little extra horse feed, sometimes only a balancer. A horse feed calculator uk or a horse feeding chart can help estimate a rough guide, but you should revise in line with 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 keeps nutrients balanced 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 monitoring for signs of colic or laminitis risk, keeping the ration consistent, and adjusting it when the horse's needs change.