

What is a forage-based diet for horses?

A **forage-based diet** is one where the majority of the daily ration comes from coarse feed including **hay**, **haylage** or **grazing**. For many horses, forage ought to be the foundation of the diet because it supports gut health, provides steady **digestible fibre**, and encourages normal eating patterns. This approach follows **forage-first feeding**, which seeks to cover most of its nutritional needs as possible via roughage prior to supplying any supplemental horse feed.

A practical benefit is that forage offers a horse an outlet to chew on for longer, which can support saliva flow and digestive function. That matters because a horse's digestive tract is built for near-continuous intake of forage. This type of diet also tends to deliver steadier **energy density** than concentrated rations, which may be helpful for horses that don't need many of supplemental energy.

That said, forage isn't always complete nutritionally by itself. Quality of hay, haylage, and grazing may vary widely, affecting **nutrient balance**, **vitamins and minerals**, and general **calorie intake**. For this reason two horses on a similar forage-based diet may need different levels of horse feed, or no horse feed at all.

When should a horse benefit from feed beyond forage?

Supplemental **horse feed** becomes useful when forage alone does not meet the horse's **energy needs**, nutrient needs, or condition goals. A clear 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. In comparison, a horse in harder work, growing horses, older horses with poorer teeth, or horses with low appetite may need additional calories and nutrients from carefully chosen feed. What matters is not to add feed automatically, but to match the ration to the horse's real needs.

Bifid UK

+44 800 422 0888

sales@bifid.co.uk

<https://bifid.com/uk/>

Watch for these practical indicators:

- If the horse is getting lighter, forage intake may be too low or too poor in quality.
- If body fat is increasing, 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.
- When coat, muscle, or recovery problems appear, the ration may lack key nutrients even if the horse looks well.

Put simply, horse feed is needed when forage no longer fully covers the horse's **dietary needs** for health, condition, and activity.

Types of horse feed to use with forage

There are several **types of horse feed** that can be combined with forage, and selecting the right one depends on the horse's condition, workload, and digestive tolerance. The main options include a **complete horse feed**, a **balancer**, and conventional **concentrates**.

A **complete horse feed** is designed to provide roughage, energy, vitamins and minerals in one product. It can be useful for owners who want a straightforward 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 higher-energy 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.

How to choose horse feed for those just starting

For **horse feed for beginners**, a practical first step is to prioritise forage, then choose feed based on **digestibility**, **fibre**, and **starch** levels. Beginners often overcomplicate feeding, but the most reliable method is to start with the horse's body condition, work level, and forage quality.

Feed that is highly digestible 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 should be the core of the ration because it supports gut health and offers slower-release calories. That is why many modern feeds focus on fibre-based formulations rather than cereal-heavy mixes.

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.

If you are not sure how to start, 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.

Rules for horse feeding every owner should follow

Good **horse feeding rules** are simple, regular, and centered on the horse's digestive system. The idea behind the **10 rules of feeding horses** is not rigid perfection, but useful habits that lower risk and improve health.

- Build the ration on grazing first.
- Use **ad-lib forage** where appropriate and suitable for the horse's condition.
- Feed **small meals** rather than large bucket feeds.
- Introduce 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.

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

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

How much horse feed should you give?

There is no single answer to how much **horse feed** a horse should have, because the right amount depends on **bodyweight**, forage intake, condition, and activity. A **horse feeding chart** can give a starting point, but it should never 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 makes a complete horse feed?

A **complete horse feed** is a product designed to provide something beyond calories. It usually contains **minerals and vitamins**, a **fiber source**, and a balanced energy profile, often with **low starch** levels compared with traditional cereal-based feeds. It is intended to make easier the ration by combining several elements into one product.

For many owners, the appeal of a fully [overweight horse feed](#) balanced feed is simplicity. It can suit many cases when you want to feed from a single tub without adding multiple extras. The fibre source helps promote gut function, while the vitamins and minerals are designed to close common nutritional gaps in a forage led diet.

That said, fully balanced does not always mean best for every horse. The ration still needs to match the horse's **energy requirements**, digestibility needs, and appetite. A horse that does well on forage and a balancer may not need a complete feed at all. Another horse with a higher workload may gain from one if it supplies sufficient calories without too much starch.

Horse feed cost: what determines the price?

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

Horse feed companies often price products based on nutrition concentration and how much of the product is needed per day. A feed with a more elevated feed rate may appear cheaper per bag, but the true daily cost may be higher. A more dense balancer or complete feed may seem expensive initially, yet lower daily servings can make it economical overall.

Component quality is important because it affects digestive efficiency, taste acceptance, and nutrient availability. If a feed is designed for better fiber digestion or lower starch, that can affect the price. Bag size also changes the comparison: larger bags may lower the cost per kilo, but only if the horse will use the product before it loses quality or becomes less practical.

To evaluate value properly, consider in daily ration terms, not just bag price.

Horse feed guidance: matching ration to condition and workload

Effective **horse feed advice uk** opens with **condition scoring**. When you know whether the horse is underweight, in good condition, or carrying excess condition, it becomes much easier to decide whether to raise or decrease the ration. Add this with workload and you can build a much more reliable feeding plan.

A **performance horse** usually needs higher energy levels, better nutrient support, and sometimes a feed with higher energy density than a leisure horse. However, not every performance horse needs a big quantity of concentrates. Some do well on premium forage, a balancer, and a modest extra ration that supports recovery and work without making the horse too fizzy.

An **easy keeper** is the other challenge. These horses often maintain condition well, sometimes too well, on relatively little feed. They usually need lower energy intake but still require balanced nutrients. In these cases, a balancer and controlled forage may be a better choice 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 important than guesswork.

How to build a simple horse feed mix recipe

A simple **horse feed mix recipe** does not need to be elaborate. 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 increase 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 best simple recipe is one that the horse enjoys eating, digests well, and can stay on consistently. You are seeking easy acceptance, digestive health, and steady energy rather than a lengthy list of components. Make changes gradually and track how the horse responds as time passes.

Popular brands and horse feed companies to compare

When comparing **horse feed companies**, prioritize product **specification** rather than marketing language. Various 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 consider when looking for structured feeding options. What matters is whether a product in the range matches the horse's forage-led ration, provides 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 really needs.

Always compare:

- Which 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 result in serious health issues. Too much starch or poorly balanced rations may increase the risk of **laminitis** in susceptible horses. Oversized or inconsistently managed meals can also lead to **colic**. A careful feeding routine, regular forage supply, and careful use of horse feed help reduce those risks.

Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

The **what should i feed my horse quiz** below is a straightforward 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?** If yes, forage plus a balancer may be enough.
- **Is the forage good quality and the horse's body condition stable?** If yes, extra feed may be minimal.
- **Is the horse losing weight or lacking topline?** When yes, you may need additional energy or a more balanced ration.
- **Is the horse doing harder work?** If so, consider a feed with more energy support.
- **Is the horse an easy keeper?** If yes, avoid unnecessary concentrates and focus on nutrient balance.

If your answers suggest different things, start with forage analysis if possible, then use a balancer or complete feed before moving to richer options. That is the most sensible way to match the ration to actual need.

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 an 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 **reduced sugar horse feed** supplementation. A horse's daily ration should be based on the quality of forage, body condition, and workload, not on what seems to work in a game.

Real horse nutrition is also more subtle because horses need regular fibre intake, careful management of starch, and careful focus to appetite and digestion. What looks easy in a game becomes a structured 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 primary part of the ration, then decide 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 first estimate, 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.