

For Your Information

Courtesy Of:

Cotati Large Animal Hospital

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Feeding Guidelines for the Pleasure Horse

A good starting point is 2% of body weight. For a 1000 lbs horse, that would be 20 lbs of feed per day. This is for maintenance and low level work. As the activity level increases, so will the nutritional requirements.

Approximate feed weight

Alfalfa hay (3" flake) = 5 lbs

Grass hay (3" flake) = 2.5 lbs

Oats (1 lb coffee can) = 1 lb

Sweet feed (1 lb coffee can) = 1.25 lbs

Corn (1 lb coffee can) = 1.5 lbs

Pellets (1 lb coffee can) = 1.5 lbs

Horses only require grain if their activity level exceeds the ability of the hay in their diet to meet the animal's needs. If grain is being fed, it should not be more than 6 lbs per day in most cases.

Protein: protein quality is less important in horses on maintenance than in growing horses. The daily requirement for maintenance is 600 grams of crude protein for a 1000 lbs horse.

Supplements: there are complete supplements, vitamin supplements, mineral supplements, energy supplements, and specialty supplements. They are usually not necessary for most pleasure horses and can cause health problems. Consult a veterinarian or nutritionist before adding a lot of supplements to the diet.

Fat: fat supplements can be beneficial for improving coat condition and increasing energy density in the diet. One cup of corn oil is equivalent to 1.5 lbs of feed. Corn oil can be unpleasant tasting to horses to start with a small amount and increase the amount over a few weeks until you reach about 1 cup. Other supplements that are high in fat are stabilized rice bran and ground flaxseed. Flaxseed is also high in omega-3 fatty acids unlike corn oil.

Conditions that increase nutritional requirements

Light work: frequent showing, English and Western pleasure, bridle path hack,
25% increase from maintenance

Medium work: ranch work, barrel racing, jumping
50% increase from maintenance

Intense work: race training, polo, 3 day eventing, endurance riding
Double maintenance requirements

****Riding 2 times a week does not increase requirements****

General feeding guidelines

1. Most horses will do well on 16-18 lbs of good quality hay per day (approximately 2% of body weight). Alfalfa should not make up more than 50% of the total amount of hay. Less feed will be required if pasture is available (2 horses per acre).
2. Fresh water should be available at all times. Water is considered the most important and most overlooked nutrient of all. Estimates range from 6-8 gallons per day.
3. Grain is only necessary if a horse's activity exceeds the ability of hay to meet its needs. Many pleasure horses receive 5-6 lbs of grain and 10-12 lbs of hay daily, a ratio of 30:70 grain to hay. This is probably more grain than is needed in most cases. Maximum ration for any horse is 50:50.

4. A combination salt and trace mineral block should be provided to supply minerals that may be low in the hay and grain. The block will also help encourage water consumption.