

## **A Safe Home for Your Horse**

Whether you are purchasing your first horse for your new Jefferson County home and horse property or if you are moving your old friend to your new home, there are several considerations that need to be made prior to making the move. Your horse needs a safe home and there are several key factors that will ensure that your new home is both suitable and safe for your equine friend.

### **The Barn**

Depending on the size of your property and the number of horses you own, it is probably not necessary for you to have a large barn with twenty stalls. Although, a barn that has one or two stalls, a feed room and a tack room is always something nice to have. But, if your property is not large enough to allow you to build this barn, or if your budget won't allow, then a lean-to may be your best option.

If you do have a barn or build a barn, there are several key features that will make it a good and useful barn. Lighting is a necessity. There is nothing worse than feeding in the dark. You don't know what may be lurking in your feed can, your horse may refuse to walk into a dark barn or stall and when the weather is poor you need to watch where you're walking. Light switches and plug-ins, which are also useful in a barn, should be weatherproof and it's even handier if they glow in the dark.

Ventilation is also a necessity, especially if you are breeding. Poor ventilation is the number one cause of illness among horses in a barn. Foals will inhale ammonia from urine if the barn is not ventilated, causing a host of other health issues because the fumes hover right above their heads. When barns become warm due to air not being able to escape, a cough or sneeze by a horse will carry the germs and bacteria twice as far as if it is slightly chilly (to us) in the barn. Remember, horses will be okay without a blanket down to 18 degrees F. Ceiling vents that are not clogged by bird nests and do not allow rain to enter are a must. Barn walls should also be insulated so that they provide cool shade in the summer and warmth in the winter.

Flooring should be non-slip and waterproof. Barns in damp Colorado conditions will also benefit if there are floor drains. Clay forms are ideal as they are firm, warm and natural. Concrete is okay for aisles, but should not be used in stalls. Concrete should also be roughened to prevent slipping.

If a lean-to is a better option for you, then consider one with stall doors on it. There is always going to be a time when you need to lock your horse up and doors will allow you that option. It is also ideal if they can be lighted for your convenience. Be sure to consider the number of horses you have before building a lean-to as two horses locked up in a small lean-to could be a dangerous situation. The same is true if they are eating together in the same lean-to, as many horses become food aggressive in these situations.

### **The Pasture**

The first thing you must realize about horses is that when they eat, they tear the grass out of the ground root and all. That means with every bite they take, your pasture is slowly disappearing and will need a substantial amount of time to grow back. With that said, it is important to follow the acre per horse rule and even then it is better to have two acres per horse. Two horses on one acre will quickly clean out a pasture. If it is at all possible, consider splitting your pasture into two paddocks and grazing on a rotation. This will provide time for the other half to re-grow. If your pasture is bad, it may need to be burned to encourage new growth and possible reseeding.

Every horse needs access to some type of forage and the more time they spend on pasture the better. But, on a small acreage, you also need to provide hay. A good round bale in a ring to reduce waste of hay is ideal for the owner who has one or two horses. This will increase the life of your pasture and provide your horses with the forage they need.

Pastures also need to be well maintained. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, so to avoid your fence being pushed down or horses getting caught in it, consider running a hot wire around it. This will keep your horse off the fence, your fence looking nice and prevent injuries. Also, avoid barbed wire of any type and the smaller the holes in the fencing, the better to prevent hooves being caught and legs tangled. You will also want to regularly walk the pasture checking for holes and poisonous weeds as well. Limit the amount of stuff, such as junk, that is in the pasture as well for the safety of your horse.

Pastures need to have ample drainage. Flooded pastures pose many health risks including thrush, white line disease, and West Nile Virus due to mosquitoes growing in stagnant water, just to name a few. Plus, horses stomping around in the mud will kill your grass and your pasture will need to be reseeded.

### **Water Access**

If you have a small pond or creek on your property, never assume that your horses are getting adequate water from it. If summers are dry, it may dry up and your horses may not have any water. In the winter, they are likely to freeze up and leave your horses without water. Some horses have never drunk water out of natural sources and simply won't do it and if the pond is stagnant with moss or algae, they are likely to avoid it as well.

No matter what type of natural water source you have, be certain to provide a water trough with fresh and clean water in it. For winters, consider a heating element to reduce you having to break ice up. You may also consider an automatic float that will fill the tank when it gets below a certain level. Once you have an automatic watering system that is heated, you will never go back and is well-worth the investment for pastures and stalls. Additionally, horses are more likely to drink more water in the winter if it is slightly warm. Most dehydration and colic occurs in the winter when horses are not drinking adequate amounts of water.

By following these simple tips and ensuring that your horse's barn and pasture are safe, you will have a happy equine friend for many years to come.