

# 10 Tips for Winterizing Your Horse

Whether your region's winter weather consists of cooler temps and occasional rains, or if you're in for months of frigid winds and endless snowfall, you can take steps to make the season more manageable. The Horse has formulated 10 veterinarian-approved tips for keeping your horse healthy and comfortable during the cold season. Check these off your to-do list before the temperatures plunge and the snow arrives.

**1 Blanket Maintenance** If your horse stays in work or competes during the winter, it might be necessary to body clip and blanket him. So dig out your blankets and rugs, make sure they're clean and in good repair, and check that they still fit well to prevent sores and hair loss.

**2 Assess Body Condition** Going into winter, it's important to evaluate your horse's body condition to determine if he's too fat, too thin, or just right. A healthy layer of fat over your horse's ribs both insulates and provides energy during cold months. Remember that it's easier and cheaper to improve your horse's body condition before mid-winter when you realize he's become thin.

**3 Check His Teeth** If your horse has developed sharp edges or uneven wear patterns on his teeth, he might not be receiving adequate calories to maintain his weight during winter. Have a veterinary dental practitioner evaluate and/or float your horse's teeth in the fall so you're not spending extra money on groceries in an effort to promote weight gain in the midst of (or immediately after) winter.

**4 Adjust Feed** Because horses' nutrient requirements increase with colder temperatures, you might need to adjust your horse's feed rations during this time to ensure he maintains adequate body condition. Routinely evaluate his condition (e.g., feeling over his ribs) and increase forage intake, rather than concentrates, as needed for increased calories. If you plan to ride less during winter, he might require less concentrate feed. Remember, however, to make any feed changes slowly to avoid gastrointestinal upset.



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Feeding a good-quality hay helps reduce colic risk and generate internal heat.



**5 Focus on Forage** Feeding good-quality hay at 1-2.5% of your horse's weight daily is key to sustaining a horse through winter with less risk of colic or weight loss and the added benefit of internal heat generation. Stock up on quality hay early, particularly in areas affected earlier in the year by drought, since supplies might be scarce.

**6 Care for the Coat** If your horse is not competing or going to be in steady work, go ahead and let his hair coat grow and thicken naturally to provide him with nature's intended insulation. However, avoid blanketing these horses with tight-fitting or heavy-duty rugs. These can flatten the hair coat, reducing its insulating effect.

**7 Tend to the Hooves** Horses that will not be in work during winter can benefit from having their shoes pulled, whereas those that still require shoes can benefit from borium studs or nails for additional traction and snow pads for reducing snow and ice accumulation. Before you turn any horse out for the winter, have your farrier give him a good trim.

**8 Promote Hydration** Inadequate water intake is a common cause of impaction colic in winter. Thus, check water heaters during the fall to make sure they're in working order, well-grounded, and that electrical wires are protected with chew-proof material such as PVC pipe. Providing free-choice trace mineralized salt can also encourage your horse to drink throughout winter. If your horse does not use his salt block, consider adding 1 tbsp of table salt to his grain once or twice daily.

**9 Control Parasites** Although parasites might be less prevalent in cold climates during winter, it's still important to maintain a regular deworming plan. Work with your veterinarian to perform a fecal egg count to determine if deworming is needed. Consider administering an ivermectin-type dewormer after the first heavy frost to rid your horse of bot larvae that like to winter in horses' gastrointestinal tract.

**10 Update Vaccinations** Make sure your horse's vaccinations are up-to-date before winter hits, especially if your riding or competition plans involve traveling to indoor events where a number of horses are housed in close quarters. Here horses might be at an increased risk for developing respiratory disease. If you plan to travel, ask your veterinarian if vaccine boosters against infectious diseases such as influenza and rhinopneumonitis are needed.



Check that blankets fit properly to prevent sores and hair loss.

Don't take your horse's health for granted this winter season—work with your veterinarian and farrier to formulate a wellness, hoof care, and feeding plan that will help ward off cold weather woes and ensure your horse exits the cold months in fine form. 🐾