

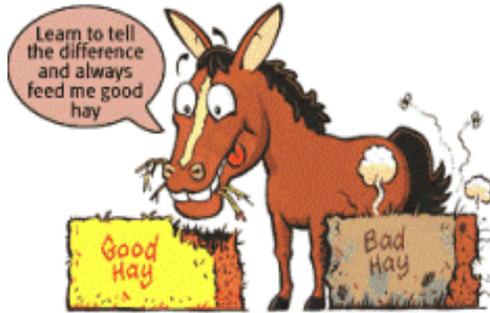


What's Up Doc?

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IN THIS ISSUE

HAY There:
Forages and
General
Nutritional
Guidelines
for Horses



quality hay from unsatisfactory hay. Nutritional analysis is used to obtain a detailed study of hay with specific levels of protein, energy, and mineral content. Countryside Large Animal Veterinary Service can take hay samples to send off to Equi-Analytical Laboratories for a nutritional analysis.

HAY There: Forages and General Nutritional Guidelines for Horses

When choosing hay for your horses there are many types and grades to choose from. Quality hay typically falls into two categories: grass or legume hay. There are ways to visually and numerically discern



Alfalfa is the most common legume hay and is widely produced and sold. Alfalfa is a high yielding and extremely nutritious crop. It is known to be a more palatable hay and tends to be the more popular hay with horses. Due to the high calcium in alfalfa, it is commonly used in horses with ulcer problems. It is believed the high calcium is a buffer and acts as an antacid. Alfalfa is a great source of calories, protein and vitamins for horses. The high calories and protein in alfalfa can be helpful for hard keepers and high-performance horses.

Common grass hay varieties in Colorado include orchard grass, timothy, and brome. Grass hay is typically lower in protein and calcium but tends to be higher in sugars and starches. It is also higher in carbohydrates which is not necessarily ideal for horses with metabolic concerns. Due to the lower protein and energy and increased fiber it is good for easy-keepers because it can be grazed on all day. Horses are natural grazers, eating free choice grass hay keeps their digestive tract moving properly. Free choice hay also keeps their minds active helping prevent vices like sucking wind, weaving, and wood chewing. Grass hay often needs to be supplemented with alfalfa a ration balancer or grain as it is not a balanced diet on its own.





When buying hay, it's always a good idea to buy a few bales and break them open to examine the hay inside the bale. Choose a hay that is nutritious and safe for horses. Be cautious of dust, mold, and excessive moisture and heat. Also inspect the hay for foreign material like trash, wire, weeds, bugs, animal feces, or animals. Hay should appear light green, especially in the middle of the bale. Yellowing on the outside is due to sun bleaching. Extremely green hay indicates an excessive moisture content which can be a fire hazard, and is more likely to become moldy over

time. Hay that is gray, very yellow or black should never be fed to horses, as this is not palatable or safe for horses. Horses often prefer soft hay with more leaves and less stems. Hay with a high stem to leaf ratio will typically be less nutritious, palatable, and digestible. The more mature the hay is at cutting the more stems it is likely to have. Feeding higher quality forages will help decrease the amount of grain and supplements needed to meet the nutritional requirements of the average maintenance horse. High quality forages also provide energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, and help maintain normal gut activity. Horses need to eat around 2.5% of their body weight daily. For example, a 1,000-pound average working adult horse would eat 25 pounds of hay per day. The bulk of this should be in forage, whether on pasture or hay.

The horse's performance level will determine the type and amount of hay that should be fed daily. High performing race or dressage horses along with lactating mares and weanlings will typically require additional grain and supplements to meet their higher nutritional demands. When considering adding grain to a horse's diet be sure to research, not all grains are created equal! One pound of corn does NOT equal one pound of senior feed. A volume of corn equals about two volumes of oats. Ideally horses should not intake more than 1.25 pounds of grain per 100 pounds of body weight. This total amount should be broken up into multiple feedings per day. Less grain is safer; thus, one should ensure there is adequate quality hay available before adding grain.

Forages should make up any horse's main diet from performance work to pasture life. Quality hay for horses to eat will help keep them healthy and ready to work hard. When considering changing a horse's diet, make sure to do it gradually over days to a week. Feel free to ask a veterinarian at Countryside Large Animal Veterinary Services for nutritional advice!