

# Horse Pasture Management Guide

The average horse needs about 0.75 of a hectare of good pasture for grazing (that's per horse). So, if you own five horses, you will need around 4 hectares of pasture to adequately take care of their needs.

## Step 1: Fertilise

A pasture can become very productive if the plants are fed. When comparing feed costs to maintaining a fertile, productive pasture, a few dollars spent on soil nutrients is a wise investment. Your cheapest feed is under your horse's hooves.



Before fertilising, have soil samples taken to determine the pH of the soil and the levels of phosphorous and potassium. Have your local fertiliser representative evaluate your soil samples and recommend the best fertiliser for your pastures. Since horse pastures consist mainly of grasses, nitrogen applications will be very helpful. Fertilizer applications will ensure ample grass production all season long, keeping your pastures healthy and prolific.

## Step 2: Practice Rotational Grazing

Every pasture needs a break to re-grow, recover, and be fertilised. This can be accomplished easily by breaking a pasture into two or more sub-pastures, using either temporary or permanent fencing.

Ideally, horses should be rotated from one pasture to another when the pasture is grazed down 75 – 100 mm and the next pasture has grown to at least 150-200 mm. In the spring there may be too much forage growing for the horses to keep up with. If so, the number of hectare's being grazed needs to be reduced, made into hay, or mowed off. In contrast, summer rotations will be longer, and supplemental hay feeding may be needed. The more a pasture can be divided, the easier it will be to manage. Electric fencing can be very helpful for pasture subdivisions.



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Keeping the pasture mown will help reduce the problem of selective grazing and keep the whole pasture in the vegetative, edible stage. Use the easiest, most efficient way available to mow down the tall grass, weeds, and undesirable plants. Spot spraying with a selective herbicide can also be helpful for weed control.

## Step 3: Overseed When Applicable

Even good pastures thin out over time. New seed should be added annually to ensure that your pastures produce good grass. Existing grasses may re-seed themselves, but they probably won't be the type you, or your horses are looking for. Naturally, the weeds will easily re-seed and spread. Don't wait until the weeds take over. Be proactive and regularly add quality forage seeds.

The best time to overseed is either spring or autumn. Autumn is preferable because the weed pressure will be less. Ideally you should "scratch" or disturb the surface enough to ensure good seed-to-soil contact. All you'll need is a broadcast spreader and seed. Red and White clovers and some grasses (especially ryegrasses) are well adapted to this practice.

A newly treated pasture must be handled carefully. The seedlings will not tolerate grazing until approximately six weeks after they have emerged.

When choosing seed for new pastures or for renovating existing pastures, always choose an improved 'Novel' endophyte or endophyte-free cultivars. Always consult a pasture seed expert on the best cultivars for your situation.

Horses are tough on pastures, but with proper management, basic "horse-sense," and patience, you can enjoy a successful and productive horse pasture.



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