

The ideal **horse feed** to serve alongside **hay** depends on which nutrients the horse is missing from forage, how much labor it does, and whether its body condition is stable. In many cases, good hay plus a **ration balancer** or a limited amount of **concentrates** is enough. Horses that need more **energy** may do better with a higher-nutrient **complete horse feed**, while easy keepers often need little more than forage and targeted **vitamins and minerals**.

The simple answer is this: offer the least amount of horse feed needed to meet the horse's **energy requirements** and nutrient needs without upsetting **digestive health**. That means starting with hay, then choosing a feed that works with the **forage** rather than replacing it. A **forage-first** approach promotes the **digestive system**, improves **gut health**, and helps you manage **condition** more carefully than relying on large meals of dense feed.

What does a horse need when hay is the main forage?

When **hay** is the primary **forage**, the horse's diet should still cover several core needs: enough **fibre** to keep the digestive system functioning well, adequate calories to match workload, and adequate micronutrients to cover gaps in the forage. Quality hay can supply a lot of the daily diet, but hay quality varies in **digestibility**, protein, and mineral content. For that reason two horses eating the same hay may still need different horse feed plans.

The first question is whether the horse has sufficient **energy** from hay alone. A horse in light work may maintain well on forage plus a low-calorie balancer, while a horse in harder **workload** may need additional calories to maintain weight and performance. The second question is nutrient balance. Even excellent hay may not provide enough **protein**, copper, zinc, selenium, or other **micronutrients**. Here a targeted feed can help create a more complete **balanced diet**.

For horses, forage is not just filler. It is the foundation of **digestive health**. Fibre supports chewing, saliva production, and a stable gut environment. A well-built feeding plan aims to maintain a steady **ration** of forage across the day, then use horse feed only to top up what hay cannot provide. That is the basis of most sensible feeding plans for leisure horses, working horses, and horses needing **weight management**.

Kinds of horse feed to use with hay

There exist numerous **varieties of horse feed** to choose from, but not all are ideal alongside hay in the same way. Broadly, horse feed can be grouped into a few practical categories: **concentrates**, **nuts**, **mashes**, balancers, and fully fortified feeds. The most suitable choice depends on the horse's **condition**, appetite, and the **feed rate** needed to deliver calories and nutrients.

Concentrates are feeds that provide extra calories and nutrients in a smaller meal than forage. They are useful when a horse needs additional **energy** or when hay alone is not enough. However, concentrates should be picked thoughtfully because some are high in **starch**. Too much starch at once can challenge the digestive system and may be unsuitable for horses prone to excitability or poor gut health.

Nuts are a popular choice because they are easy to feed, often palatable, and can come in fibre-based or conditioning forms. A fibre-based nut [calorie controlled horse feed](#) is usually a good companion to hay because it supports a forage-led ration. Conditioning nuts may suit horses needing more calories, but the total ration still needs to be matched to body condition score and workload.

Mashes can be useful for older horses, poor drinkers, or horses that benefit from a softer meal. A mash may improve palatability and make fibre easier to eat, but it should not be chosen simply because it seems gentle.

Check the actual nutrient profile, as some mashes are mainly a carrier rather than a complete feed. Used well, mashes can support hydration and meal size management.

Other common options include **ration balancer** products and low-intake balancers. These are designed to deliver vitamins and minerals with minimal calories, making them useful when hay is already supplying enough energy. In many cases, this is the smartest option for good-doers, native types, or horses in light work.

When is complete horse feed the best option?

A **complete horse feed** can be the right choice when you need a practical single ration that delivers calories, **vitamins and minerals**, and a well-rounded nutrient profile in one product. It is especially helpful for owners who want a straightforward feeding system and do not want to combine several separate products. The key benefit is ease, but the real advantage is that the feed is formulated as part of a **balanced ration**.

Complete feeds can work well when hay quality is variable, when a horse struggles to hold weight, or when you want a managed intake for training and performance. They are also useful for horses that need a consistent feed plan without lots of guesswork. That said, “complete” does not mean “best for every horse”. If the horse is overweight, a lower-calorie balancer may be more suitable than a calorie-rich complete feed.

To decide whether a complete horse feed is right, check how it works with the hay. A good product should complement forage, not encourage overfeeding. It should also fit the horse’s workload, age, and digestive needs. Horses in heavy work may need a greater nutrient density, while horses on maintenance may only need a small amount of feed with hay.

Another advantage of complete feeds is consistency. When buying from horse feed companies, the specification should make it easy to compare nutrient levels from batch to batch. This can reduce uncertainty in your feeding plan and make it easier to maintain condition through the seasons.

How far horse feed should you feed with hay?

There is no single rule to how much horse feed should be fed with hay, because the right amount depends on forage intake, body size, age, work, and body condition score. A helpful starting point is to estimate hay intake, then review whether the horse maintains a healthy body condition score. If the horse is losing weight, lacking topline, or struggling in work, additional calories may be required. If the horse is gaining too easily, feed should be reduced.

A **horse feeding chart** can be a helpful tool for general daily intake, but it should never replace observation. Charts give a starting point for feed rate, yet the horse’s actual response matters most. This is where a **horse feed calculator uk** tool can be useful as a planning aid, but it is still only a guide. You must adjust for forage quality, energy requirements, and the horse’s measured condition.

Body condition score is one of the best tools for deciding quantities. If the horse is too lean, you may need to raise calorie density through concentrates, nuts, or a complete horse feed. If the horse is too fleshy, cut the amount of horse feed and rely more heavily on hay and fibre-based options. For many horses, the safest strategy is to use the minimum practical meal size that supports maintenance and performance.

As a simple rule, start with the minimum amount needed to balance the hay, then increase only if there is a clear reason. Avoid large jumps in ration size, especially with starch-rich feeds. The goal is steady digestion and stable condition, not excessive intake.

Horse feeding rules: everyday basics to follow

Sound **horse feeding rules** promote gut health, aid energy use, and prevent avoidable digestive upsets. These principles are often summarised as the **10 rules of feeding horses**, and while different yards may phrase them differently, the core ideas are the same.

- Feed plenty of forage first
- Leave hay available for as many hours of the day as possible.
- Match horse feed to workload, age, and condition.
- Keep starch intake in check.
- Keep meals modest.
- Make any changes gradually.
- Ensure clean water at all times.
- Use salt and supplementation appropriately.
- Check body condition regularly.
- Adjust the ration whenever workload, hay, or season changes.

Two of the most important nutrients to manage are **starch** and **fibre**. Fibre should remain the base of the ration because it supports the digestive system and helps maintain gut health. Starch can supply quick calories, but too much starch in one meal can increase the risk of digestive upset and should be kept in check, especially for horses with a sensitive digestive system.

These feeding rules are not complicated, but they are powerful. A consistent plan with the right feed rate is usually better than switching products often. Horses thrive on routine, stable forage intake, and a well-matched feeding plan.

Equine feed for beginners: how to start safely

If you are new to feeding, the safest **horse feed for beginners** is usually a choice that is straightforward, fibre-based, and easy to introduce. The key aim is a **gradual change** that does not disturb the gut. Quick diet switches can upset the digestive system and increase the risk of **colic**, especially when moving between feed types or changing hay quality.

A practical feeding plan begins with forage, clean water, and a consistent meal time. Then introduce the new horse feed slowly over 7 to 14 days, increasing the amount little by little while reducing the old feed. This gives the digestive system time to adapt. If the horse is nervous, poor doer, or highly active, monitor weight, droppings, and appetite closely during the transition.

For beginners, a ration balancer or a simple complete feed can be easier to manage than mixing several products. The fewer moving parts in the feeding routine, the easier it is to spot what works. Keep a note of meal size, condition, and behaviour so you can make changes based on evidence rather than guesswork.

How to assess horse feed manufacturers and labels

When reviewing **horse feed companies**, do not rely only on branding. Study the **feed label**, compare the **specification**, and examine the **ingredients**. A useful label should explain what the feed is formulated to do, how much to feed, and which nutrients are included. The ingredient list shows the raw materials, but the specification tells you what the horse actually receives.

Look for detailed information on calories, protein, fibre, starch, oil, and mineral levels. These details matter much more than marketing language. If you are comparing products for a horse on hay, assess whether the feed provides the right nutrient density for that horse's workload and condition. A lower-starch fibre feed may suit some horses better than a calorie-dense option.

It is also useful reviewing how horse feed companies describe intended use. Some feeds are aimed at leisure horses, others at performance, breeding, or weight gain. A good product should match the role the hay is already playing in the ration. Among well-known brands, some owners compare options such as **spillers horse feed** alongside other range types to see which specification best suits the horse.

The best comparison method is simple: pair the label to the horse, not the other way around. That approach helps you choose with confidence and avoid unnecessary supplementation.

What affects horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost depends on more than just the bag price. To understand **how much does horse feed cost**, you need to think about ration size, feed quality, and how much of the bag is actually fed each day. A higher-priced bag may be better overall value if the horse needs less of it to meet nutrient needs.

Ration size has a big effect on cost. A nutrient-dense product that meets the horse's needs in a small daily amount may be more economical than a cheap feed that must be fed in large quantities. Feed quality matters too, because better digestibility, improved palatability, and a more balanced nutrient profile can reduce waste and improve consistency.

When comparing cost, work out the daily spend rather than the price per bag. That gives a more accurate view of value. For a horse on hay, a ration balancer may be one of the most budget-friendly options because it delivers vitamins and minerals with a low feed rate. In contrast, a conditioning feed may run higher more because it is designed to provide more calories.

Saving money should never come at the expense of digestive health. Sometimes the cheapest safe answer is the one that maintains the ration simple and avoids unnecessary extras.

Can you make a horse feed mix recipe at home?

A homemade **horse feed mix recipe** can be suitable, but only if you understand the nutritional gaps and adjust the ration carefully. The classic home-mix ingredients often include **oats**, **barley**, and **beet pulp**. Each brings different qualities: oats are generally more palatable and easier to chew, barley is more energy-dense but should be handled carefully, and beet pulp adds fermentable fibre.

Home mixing can be useful when you want full control over ingredients and meal size. However, it is easy to create an unbalanced ration if the mineral and vitamin content is overlooked. That is why many owners pair a home mix with a ration balancer or targeted supplementation. Without this, the mix may fall short in vitamins and minerals even if it supplies plenty of calories.

Be especially cautious with starch-heavy ingredients. A mix based mainly on oats and barley may suit some horses in hard work, but it may not be appropriate for horses needing a low-starch diet. Beet pulp can help raise fibre and improve digestibility, making it a useful part of a more balanced home mix.

If you choose a homemade route, keep records of ingredients, amounts, and the horse's response. The best recipe is the one that keeps condition stable and supports gut health without creating excess calories.

Horse feed advice UK: common feeding mistakes to avoid

Practical **horse feed advice uk** often comes down to avoiding a few common mistakes. The biggest is **overfeeding**, especially when people confuse more feed with better nutrition. Too many calories can quickly lead to poor condition, while too much starch can upset the digestive system and increase the chance of **ulcers** or other digestive issues.

Sudden changes are another common problem. Changing hay, concentrates, or balancers too quickly can disrupt the gut and lead to soft stools, reduced appetite, or colic risk. Any feeding change should be step-by-step and monitored. This is important just as much for seasoned owners as it does for owners shopping for horse feed for beginners.

Other mistakes include feeding the wrong product for the horse's workload, ignoring body condition score, and using unnecessary supplements without checking what the base ration already provides. In many cases, the horse does not need more products; it needs a better feeding plan. A forage-led diet with the right horse feed is often more helpful than a long list of extras.

Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

Use this quick **what should i feed my horse quiz** to narrow your choice. Start by asking three things: what is the horse's **work level**, what is its **age**, and what is its **weight**? Then compare those answers with the quality and quantity of hay available.

- If the horse is in light work, good-doing, and holding condition, hay plus a ration balancer may be sufficient.
- If the horse is losing weight or working harder, choose a higher-calorie feed or complete horse feed.
- If the horse is overweight, reduce calorie-dense concentrates and keep the ration fiber-focused.
- If the horse is older or fussy, consider a appetizing mash or a feed with better digestibility.
- If the horse needs only nutrients, not calories, a ration balancer is often the smartest option.

This is not a substitute for professional advice, but it does make the decision clearer. Think in terms of hay first, then fill the gap with the least needed quantity of horse feed.

FAQs about feeding horse feed with hay

What horse feed should be fed with hay?

The best horse feed to feed with hay is the one that fills the nutritional gap left by the forage. For many horses, that means a ration balancer or a fibre-based concentrate. If the horse needs more calories, a complete horse feed or a suitable nut may be better. The right choice depends on workload, body condition score, and hay quality.

Do horses need horse feed if they already get high-quality hay?

Not necessarily. If good-quality hay provides enough energy and the horse keeps condition, it may only need vitamins and minerals from a ration balancer. However, if the hay is low in nutrients, the horse is in work, or condition changes, extra horse feed may be needed to support a balanced diet.

Is complete horse feed better than mix and balancer?

Not necessarily. A complete horse feed is practical and can provide a balanced ration in one product, but a mix and balancer may be better for horses that need more control over calories, starch, or meal size. The better option depends on the horse's needs and the quality of the hay.

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How much horse feed should a horse eat with hay?

It can vary by age, weight, workload, and condition. Use a horse feeding chart or a horse feed calculator uk tool as a starting point, then adjust based on body condition score and how the horse responds. The aim is to feed enough to meet energy requirements without overfeeding.

What is the cheapest safe horse feed to feed with hay?

For many horses, the cheapest safe option is a ration balancer or a basic fibre-based feed fed at a low rate. That keeps horse feed cost down while still supplying vitamins and minerals. The lowest-cost choice is not always the cheapest long term, so compare daily cost, feed quality, and ration size rather than bag price alone.