

Pasture Management

Pasture Management: Keeping Your Land Healthy for Horses

If you're lucky enough to have your own land for your horses, managing that pasture is key to keeping it sustainable and productive. A solid pasture management plan doesn't just help the grass thrive; it also promotes your horse's health and happiness by allowing them to graze and behave naturally.

A well-maintained pasture can prevent issues like "horse sickness," where overgrazing and poor land conditions lead to a decline in grass quality, potentially impacting your horse's health. Plus, by managing your land actively, you can cultivate grasses that are beneficial for your horses and save money in the long run.

Poo Picking and Worm Control



One of the most important tasks in maintaining your pasture is regularly picking up your horse's droppings. Why? Horses shed worm eggs in their waste, which can hatch into larvae that linger in the grass, sometimes for up to nine months in cooler weather. When your horse grazes, they can unknowingly ingest these larvae, which continues the cycle of worm infestations.

Droppings typically hatch within just four to five days, so it's recommended to poo pick at least twice a week. However, the sooner you remove droppings, the better it is for your pasture and your horse's health. If droppings accumulate, they can kill off the grass underneath, leading to rough patches that your horse won't want to graze on.

Also, keep in mind that worm eggs thrive longer in shelters, so be sure to regularly clean those areas too. If you're providing supplementary feed, use containers to keep it clean and avoid contamination from bedding.

Pro Tip: Regular faecal worm egg counts are a smart way to keep an eye on your horse's worm load. You can find more details on targeted worming programs on our horse worming page. Just remember, don't harrow your fields to spread droppings around—that can actually spread the worm eggs and make the situation worse!



Daily Care for Your Pasture

Here's a handy checklist for regular pasture maintenance:

Daily:

- Check that the boundary fencing is secure and gates are closed properly.
- Look out for acorns and sycamore seeds in the fall and spring.
- Poo pick!
- Ensure the water supply is clean and working.

Weekly:

- Recheck boundary fencing and gates.
- Look for litter and monitor for holes in the ground.
- Remove any poisonous plants and fallen branches.

Monthly:

- Fence off any rabbit or badger sets, as these are protected by law.

- Monitor for oak and sycamore trees if needed.
- Keep an eye out for damaged or falling branches.

Seasonal Care for Your Pasture



Different times of the year call for specific tasks to keep your pasture in tip-top shape, largely influenced by weather conditions.

Spring:

- Conduct soil analysis.
- Remove weeds, harrow the ground, fertilise, reseed, and roll any boggy areas left from winter.

Summer:

- Focus on weed removal, harrowing, and rolling.

Autumn:

- Do another soil analysis and keep an eye on acorn and sycamore seeds.

Winter:

- Rest the paddocks as much as possible and plan for spring fertilisation.

Harrowing

Harrowing is a great way to clear out dead vegetation and improve air circulation in the soil, paving the way for fresh grass to grow. Just be cautious; if you remove too much dead plant material, it can leave the soil bare and vulnerable to weed infestations.

Be particularly careful when harrowing lighter soils, like sandy or chalky types, as they can be more easily damaged.

Pro Tip: Harrowing is best done in warm weather; avoid doing it when the ground is wet to prevent damaging the grazing.

Seeding

Overseeding is all about adding grass seeds to existing pastures to help improve quality and sustainability. The ideal time for reseeding is during warm temperatures right before it rains, particularly late August to September. Early spring is another good option.

Choose grass seed mixes that include low-energy grasses and herbs to enrich your pasture. If you're unsure what to pick, it's always wise to consult an expert. And remember, keep horses off freshly seeded pastures for about eight weeks to let the



new grass establish itself.

Fertilising

Before you add any fertiliser, test your soil to check its pH level and identify any deficiencies. It's best to take readings several times a year. With that information, you can select the right fertilisers—just be cautious, as incorrect use can lead to serious digestive issues in horses.

Natural fertilisers, like well-rotted manure, are generally the best choice for horse pastures, applied generously every few years. Just don't use horse manure as fertiliser on pastures where horses graze.

Rolling

Rolling your pasture can help flatten turf that has been disturbed by hooves, making it less prone to future damage and deterring weeds. But be careful on heavy soils like clay, as rolling can compact the ground too much and reduce drainage.

Weed Control



Keep a close eye on your paddock for weeds and any poisonous plants. They can spread quickly and ruin grazing quality, with some being dangerous for horses.

Certain weeds, like ragwort, are particularly harmful and must be removed by law. The best way to deal with ragwort is to pull it up with its roots and dispose of it properly. You can also treat it with herbicide, but make sure horses are kept away from the area for the recommended time.

Important: Always wear gloves when handling ragwort, as its toxins can irritate your skin and are harmful to humans.

Conclusion

By staying on top of pasture management, you're not only promoting a healthy environment for your horses but also ensuring they can thrive and exhibit their natural behaviours. Regular checks and seasonal care will make a world of difference in maintaining a vibrant, productive pasture.