

What is horse feed?

Horse feed is the overall term for anything made to meet equine nutrition beyond basic forage. It can include *feed concentrates*, *compound feed*, balancers, cubes, mixes, and even specific supplements designed to complement a forage-based diet. The aim is to provide a well-rounded diet with the right mix of energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, and fibre for the horse's age, workload, temperament, and body condition.

At its core, horse feed is about backing the digestive system without overloading it. Most horses should get the majority of their intake from **forage** such as **hay** or **haylage**, because forage helps promote gut health and encourages steady forage intake. Feed is then used to add nutrients that may be missing from forage alone.

There are many types of horse feed, and each serves a specific purpose. Some are suited for leisure horses needing maintenance energy, while others suit performance horses, poor doers, natives on restricted grazing, or older horses that need extra digestibility and palatability. A **complete horse feed** is one that can supply the necessary nutrition on its own, usually alongside access to forage and water, depending on the product's feeding rate and guidance on the feed label.

Understanding horse feed means looking beyond the name on the bag. The ingredients, nutrients, starch level, fibre content, protein, vitamins, and minerals all count. A feed with reduced starch and higher fibre may be better for some horses, while a more energy-dense ration may suit horses in heavier work. In other words, horse feed is not one single product, but a category of feeding options.

What are pelleted feeds in horse nutrition?

Pelleted feeds are a physical form of horse feed rather than a distinct nutritional category. They are made by grinding ingredients and forming them into small, uniform shapes. Pellet feeds can be designed as a balanced horse feed, a balancer, or a supplement-style product depending on the formulation.

In horse nutrition, pellets are widely used because they are simple to measure, easy to mix with other feed, and often more reliable from batch to batch than textured mixes. They may be based on fibre, cereals, protein sources, vitamins, and minerals, with the exact ingredients varying by brand and intended use. Because the particles are compressed, some horses find them easier to chew and less messy to eat.

Pellets can be useful for owners who want a simple feeding routine and clear portion control. They can also improve palatability for some horses, especially when compared with plain chaff or straights. However, not all pellets are identical. Some are high-fibre and forage-based, while others are more concentrated and may include more starch or added energy for harder-working horses.

It is important not to assume that all pellets are automatically complete horse feed. Some are complete, some are designed as a supplement, and some must be fed with other components to create a balanced ration. The feed label is the key to understanding whether pellets can stand alone or should be combined with forage and another mix. In practice, pellets are simply one format among many types of horse feed.

Horse feed and pellets: how do they differ?

The main difference is that **horse feed** is the general category, while **pellets** are one form within it. In simple terms, all pellets can be horse feed if they are made for horses, but not all horse feed is pellets. Horse feed can also come as a mix, cube, mash, balancer, or compound feed.

Think of it like this: horse feed describes the nutritional purpose, while pellets describe the shape and presentation. A feed mix may contain pieces, cereals, and chopped fibre, whereas pellets are compacted and uniform. The shape affects feeding management, storage, and sometimes digestibility, but the real difference lies in ingredients and formulation.

For example, one complete horse feed may be a high-fibre pellet designed for good gut health and controlled energy. Another may be a molassed mix with cereals and added vitamins for horses needing more energy. Both are horse feed, but only one is pellets. This is why checking the feed label is so important.

Pellets may also work within different types of horse feed depending on the horse's needs. A performance feed may use pellets to deliver protein and minerals efficiently, while a maintenance feed might use pellets with lower starch and higher fibre. If you want a simple horse feed mix recipe, pellets can be one part of it, combined with forage, chaff, or a supplement as advised. But the recipe should always be based on the horse's ration and workload, not just convenience.

So, the difference is not "horse feed versus pellets" as if they were opposites. Rather, pellets are one way horse feed is manufactured and delivered. The best choice depends on digestibility, palatability, fibre content, starch level, and how well the product fits the horse's nutritional requirements.

Which is best for your horse: ration or pellets?

Neither option is automatically better. The ideal answer depends on the horse, the workload, body condition, forage intake, and feeding goals. Sound feeding principles always start with forage first, then consider whether a concentrate, compound feed, or pellet is needed to balance the diet.

A horse with a healthy body condition and light workload may do well on forage, with a small amount of low-starch horse feed if needed. A horse working more intensely may need more energy and nutrients, which could come from a high-quality complete horse feed [laminitis safe horse feed](#) in pellet or mix form. Older horses, poor doers, and horses with dental issues may benefit from a more digestible pellet or a soaked feed that is easy to chew.

Use a horse feeding chart as a guide, but treat it as a starting point rather than a rigid rule. Feeding should always reflect the individual horse's body condition, temperament, and exercise level. Some horses are quite keen and may not suit highly cereal-based feeds, while others need more readily available energy. A forage-led approach with a suitable supplement can often provide better feed management than overfeeding concentrates.

If you are unsure, look for horse feed advice UK owners can trust, ideally from a qualified nutritionist, vet, or experienced yard manager. Their recommendation should be based on the horse's digestive system, current ration, and what is already available from hay, haylage, and grazing.

In short, pellets can be better when you want consistency, easier portioning, and clean feeding. Muesli-style feeds may be better when palatability and variety matter. The best decision comes from matching the feed to the horse rather than choosing by format alone.

How much horse feed should you give?

How much horse feed you should offer depends on mass, workload, forage quality, and the horse's body condition. A horse feed calculator UK tool can help calculate a starter amount, but it should be used alongside a proper horse feeding chart and common sense. Horses are designed to eat forage steadily, so feed should back up the diet rather than dominate it.

For horse feed for beginners, the simplest rule is to feed according to need, not routine. Start by assessing how much hay or haylage the horse is already eating, then decide whether extra energy, protein, vitamins, or minerals are required. A horse in light work may need a light ration or a balancer, while a horse in more intense work may need a heavier concentrate ration split into several meals.

Horse feeding rules generally suggest avoiding large meals of concentrate, because overloading the digestive system can upset gut health. Instead, divide feed into smaller feeds through the day. This is especially important if the ration includes starch, as too much at once may affect the gut and behaviour.

Use the horse's body condition and workload to adjust feeding over time. If the condition score is too low, the horse may need more digestible calories and nutrients. If the horse is gaining [overweight horse feed](#) too much weight, reduce high-calorie feeds and lean more heavily on forage and less rich options. A horse feed calculator UK can support these decisions, but it cannot replace observation.

Always check the feed label for recommended feeding rate, as even complete horse feed should be fed within manufacturer guidance. The right ration is about equilibrium, not volume. More feed is not always better.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed pricing can vary greatly because ingredients, recipe, and brand quality all influence price. When you ask **how much does horse feed cost**, the honest answer is that it depends on whether you are buying a basic balancer, a complete horse feed, a premium competition ration, or a specialist feed for health or performance.

Some horse feed companies focus on budget-friendly maintenance feeds, while others produce premium formulas with better digestibility, specific fibre sources, or carefully balanced vitamins and minerals. Premium feeds may cost more per bag, but a reduced feeding rate can sometimes make the daily cost more reasonable than it first appears.

Spillers horse feed is an example of a widely recognised brand with different products for different needs. Like other horse feed companies, it offers feeds for leisure horses, competition horses, and horses requiring special nutritional support. Comparing products only by bag price can be misleading, because the true cost depends on the daily ration and the nutrients provided.

When estimating horse feed cost, consider:

- the size of the horse and its feed intake
- the feeding rate stated on the label
- how much forage the horse gets already
- whether it is a complete horse feed or a supplement
- how much of the bag is needed each week

For practical budgeting, it helps to compare cost per day rather than cost per bag. A feed that looks expensive may work out better value if it offers more nourishment in a smaller ration. This is especially true when feeding horses with specific requirements such as higher protein, better fibre, or controlled starch.

Common horse feed types and when to use them

There are several types of horse feed, and each has a role in feed management. Which one is best depends on whether the horse needs more energy, better fibre, improved body condition, or a simple supplement to a forage-based diet.

- **Complete horse feed** - Designed to provide a full nutritional package, often including vitamins, minerals, protein, and energy. Ideal when you need a straightforward ration alongside forage.
- **Concentrates** - Energy-dense feeds that help horses with higher workload or greater calorie needs. These may contain more starch and should be fed carefully.
- **Compound feed** - A blended feed made from several ingredients, often with added nutrients for balanced nutrition.
- **Pellets** - A compressed feed form that can be complete or supplementary, depending on formulation.
- **Forage-based feeds** - Roughage-based products that support gut health and suit horses needing lower starch.
- **Supplements** - Intended to supply specific nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, or amino acids when forage and main feed are not enough.

When deciding which to use, assess the horse's workload, temperament, and condition score. Horses that become excitable on cereal-based rations may do better with a higher-fibre product. Horses that struggle to keep weight may need more digestible calories, protein, and oil. The point is to match nutrients to need rather than chasing a label.

Bifid UK

+44 800 422 0888

sales@bifid.co.uk

<https://bifid.com/uk/>

Many horse feed companies offer a full range, including products from **Spillers horse feed** and other established brands. These ranges often include complete horse feed, balancers, cubes, and pellets. Choosing between them means understanding ingredients and the role each feed plays in the ration. A good product should support health, palatability, and consistent intake without compromising the digestive system.

10 essential rules of feeding horses every owner should know

These horse feeding rules provide a practical base for day-to-day feed management. They are particularly helpful if you are using horse feed for beginners guidance or comparing different types of horse feed.

- 1. Make forage the base of the diet, using hay or haylage as appropriate.
- 2. Feed with body condition in mind, not just routine.
- 3. Match the ration to workload and temperament.
- 4. Check the feed label for ingredients, nutrients, and feeding rate.
- 5. Keep starch levels suitable for the horse's digestive system and behaviour.
- 6. Put fibre first for gut health and steady energy.
- 7. Break concentrates into smaller meals where possible.
- 8. Provide constant access to clean water.
- 9. Use a horse feeding chart as a guide, then adapt for the individual horse.
- 10. Review the ration regularly as condition score, season, and workload shift.

These horse feeding rules are not about rigid perfection. They are about consistency and sound feed management. A horse feeding chart can help you estimate the correct ration, but no chart can replace observation. If the horse is losing weight, gaining too much, or showing signs of poor digestibility, the diet needs review.

Good horse feed advice UK owners often receive follows the same principle: start with forage and add only what is needed. This protects the digestive system, supports balanced nutrition, and reduces waste. It also helps owners avoid overfeeding a horse simply because a product looks appealing or is heavily marketed.

Horse feed and pellets FAQs

Is horse feed identical to pellets?

No. Horse feed is the general category, while pellets are one form of horse feed. Pellets may be part of a complete horse feed, but they can also act as a supplement or a specific ingredient-based product. The feed label is what shows whether the pellets are complete or need to be fed with something else.

What is the difference between complete horse feed and pellets?

A complete horse feed serves as a nutritional product designed to provide the necessary nutrients in the correct balance, usually alongside forage. Pellets are simply the shape or format of the feed. A complete horse feed can come as pellets, cubes, or a mix. Not all pellets are complete horse feed, so you need to check the formulation and feeding instructions.

How do I know how much horse feed my horse needs?

Begin with a horse feeding chart and a horse feed calculator UK tool as starting points, then modify based on body condition, workload, forage intake, and temperament. The horse's condition score is a very useful guide. If you are unsure, seek horse feed advice UK owners rely on from a vet, nutritionist, or experienced professional.

What does horse feed cost on average?

Horse feed cost varies by brand, ingredients, and feeding rate. There is no single average that works for every horse, because a small daily ration of a premium complete horse feed may cost less in practice than a larger amount of a cheaper concentrate. To work out how much does horse feed cost for your horse, compare the daily ration rather than the bag price alone.

What should I feed my horse as a beginner owner?

For horse feed for beginners, start with forage as the foundation and only add a concentrate or complete horse feed if the horse truly needs it. Select a basic formula, forage-based if possible, and match it to the horse's workload and condition score. If you are unsure, use a horse feeding chart and seek horse feed advice UK professionals can provide before making major changes.