

Ready for Fall & Winter

Scan this checklist to be sure your equine facility is prepared for increased fall and winter horse activities

By Dana Brown

The seasons are changing, and our Southern weather is ideal for outdoor activities this time of year. But is your equine facility in ship-shape for all the added riding?

Time to work on a new “To Do” list! Put in some hours doing repairs now, and make this winter’s chores run smoother later. Now is the time to plan a serious visit to your local hardware store.

Barn & Stable horse looking over fence

1. Review the condition of floors and walkways in your barn. See signs of water damage? Rodents? Check your roofing for leaks, and purchase rodent-control products.
2. Review stalls for disrepair. Look for sharp objects, loose boards, etc. Renovate immediately.
3. Brush out cobwebs. Not only are cobwebs unsightly – they’re also fire hazards, especially when located near electrical or lighting fixtures.
4. Closely inspect electrical and lighting in your barn. Have an electrician repair any suspicious wiring.
5. Change batteries in smoke alarms.
6. Make sure your barn’s fire extinguisher is updated and working.
7. If you live in a northern region, prepare all outdoor plumbing for freezing temperatures. Also, discard old, leaky hoses and purchase new hoses with working sprayers, and ensure your water trough heaters are operational.

Pastures

1. How will you maintain your pastures this winter – when grass stops growing? In order to prevent overgrazing in one area, plan your horses’ rotation schedules now.
2. Repair fences and gates. Better to do repairs now... when it’s not miserably cold outside! Take a trail ride around your pastures and note all weak fencing areas. Make plans to fix them immediately.
3. Call your local county Extension Agent for detailed pasture preparation recommendations in your area. Find out the ideal time to fertilize or lime pastures, in addition to planting winter rye.

Grooming & Blankets

Marisa Rowan, Associate Equestrian Director for the Savannah College of Art and Design, works hard to make sure SCAD’s horses are in top condition for fall and winter riding.

“After summer, horses come back rested and ready to work,” she says. “When the weather gets cooler, we body clip and begin blanketing all the horses.”

- If you haven't already, inspect, clean and repair last year's winter blankets.
- Wash all brushes, combs and other grooming equipment.
- Drop off clipper blades for sharpening.
- Locate your winter barn gloves and boots from last year.
- If you have a vacuum cleaner for grooming, stock up on filters, hoses or fittings.

Hay Storage

Plan your hay inventory as soon as possible. When purchasing hay, don't scrimp on quality. Consider partnering with neighbors and save money by purchasing entire loads at a time early in the season. Purchase only what you can adequately protect and maintain, and remember that most hays will mildew quickly in humid environments.

Update Horse Nutrition

Your horse's nutritional needs change with climate, time of year and exercise schedules. With blanketed horses, it's common to neglect their body condition if blankets aren't removed for several days. Don't be misled by furry horses, either! Horses with winter coats usually appear fatter than they actually are, so use diligence to study their condition and monitor feed and forage levels accordingly.

Hang a multi-purpose dry-erase board in your barn's feed room, and record all horses' feeding, supplement, hay and turnout schedules. This aids in organization while keeping any potential barn helpers in the loop.

“Better barn management and communication tools are critical for my operation,” says Jennifer Helgren, owner and trainer of Silverthorne Run Stables and Riding Academy in the Savannah, Georgia, area. “I incorporate tools to enable others to handle their own responsibilities so that I can do mine.”

Organize, Organize, Organize

Organization is critical in any season, but especially when the calendar is full of activities that require your attention. Organize your events (horse shows, seminars, clinics, etc.), and check for overlaps.

Reflection of You

Safe and clean facilities, well-kept feed rooms and tack rooms and

maintained equipment all demonstrate the way a person feels about his or her horses. Spending time grooming and preparing the horse you ride is all a part of building a strong partnership between horse and rider. The time you spend in maintaining your property is time well-spent, and it demonstrates the commitment you have to your horse and his or her health and environment.

Freelance writer Dana Brown writes and rides in Savannah, Georgia with her two children, Teagan, 4, and Powell, 2.