

# Horse feed vs concentrates: the simple distinction

A simple way to understand **horse feed** and **concentrates** is this: horse feed is the broad term for all feed given to a horse, while concentrates are a specific type of feed designed to deliver extra **energy**, **protein**, or other nutrients in a smaller volume than forage.

**Forage** sits at the centre of most equine diets. It includes grass, hay, haylage, and other fibrous feeds that provide **roughage** and aid the horse's **digestive system**. Concentrates, by contrast, are usually less **fibre** and higher in **digestible energy**, often with more **starch** and sometimes more protein. That means they can be beneficial for horses with higher **energy requirements**, but they need to be used with caution to maintain **nutritional balance** and good **gut health**.

In practice, the difference is not just about ingredients. It is also about purpose. A forage-based diet can work well for many horses, especially a **maintenance horse**, while concentrates may be added for a **performance horse**, a horse in hard **workload**, or one needing help with weight, condition, or recovery.

## What is considered horse feed?

The phrase **types of horse feed** includes a broad range of products. It can include straight feeds such as oats or linseed, compound feeds, balancers, chaffs, cubes, and pellets. It also includes **complete horse feed**, which is created to supply the horse's nutritional needs when fed as the main feed together with forage or, in some cases, as the full ration depending on the product and the horse's needs.

A **horse feed mix recipe** may be made at home or commercially blended. For example, some owners combine a fibre base, a conditioning source, and a vitamin and mineral supplement to create a tailored **feed ration**. Others choose ready-made feeds from **horse feed companies** because these are designed with clear **feed label** guidance, measured **starch levels**, and consistent quality.

Common horse feed products include:

- **Complete horse feed** for straightforward feeding and balanced nutrition
- **Conditioning** mixes for horses that need weight or topline support
- Low-energy fibre feeds for easier management
- Performance feeds for horses with greater output needs
- Balancers and supplements to address specific gaps in the equine diet

One well-known example among **horse feed companies** is **spillers horse feed**, which features a broad range of products for different workloads, body conditions, and feeding goals. Brand choice matters less than matching the product to the horse's daily intake, workload, and digestive needs.

## What exactly are concentrates and when do horses need them?

**Concentrates** are rations that deliver more feed value per kilo than forage. They are typically used as an **energy source** when forage alone cannot meet the horse's requirements, especially for horses in harder work, horses that struggle to hold condition, or horses with specific dietary needs.

Many concentrates are designed for **conditioning**, meaning they help improve body condition score, topline, or overall weight without requiring huge feed volumes. Others are built for performance and focus on the horse's **digestibility**, using ingredients that are easier for the horse to process and absorb.

Concentrates are not automatically “better” than forage. They are simply richer in nutrients. They may contain cereals, oil, protein sources, fibre, vitamins, and minerals, depending on the formulation. Because some concentrates are higher in **starch**, they must be fed in sensible amounts to protect **gut health** and maintain a steady feeding schedule.

In short, concentrates are used when the horse’s **energy requirements** go beyond what a forage-based diet can comfortably supply, or when a horse needs help with weight, condition, or work performance.

## Kinds of horse feed explained

Grasping the main **types of horse feed** guides you select a ration that matches the horse’s body, workload, and lifestyle. The three usual forms are **chaff**, **pellets**, and **cubes**.

**Chaff** is chopped fibre, often made from straw, hay, or alfalfa. It can help slow down eating, adds fibre content, and can be useful in a **bucket feed** to improve chewing and reduce meal speed. Chaff also helps bulk out the ration without adding too much starch.

**Pellets** are dense, uniform feeds made from ground ingredients. They are straightforward to measure, mix well with other components, and often provide a balanced nutritional profile. Some pellets are designed as a complete feed, while others act as a concentrate or balancer.

**Cubes** are similar to pellets but usually larger. They can be helpful for horses that chew well and need a more substantial feed texture. Like pellets, cubes may be fibre-based or concentrate-based, so the **feed label** matters more than the shape alone.

When comparing these **types of horse feed**, think about how they fit into the horse’s equine diet. A horse that lives on grass and hay may only need a fibre-based chaff or low-calorie balancer. A horse in harder work may benefit from pellets or cubes that add more **energy** and **protein**.

## Do you need concentrates or can a horse live on forage?

For most horses, the answer is yes: a horse can subsist on **forage** alone, so long as the forage is good quality and available in enough quantity. Horses are meant to eat **roughage** for large parts of the day, and a **forage-based diet** promotes natural digestion, stable behaviour, and better **gut health**.

However, whether forage alone is enough relies on the horse’s **body weight**, **body condition**, age, health, and **workload**. A horse in light work may maintain well on forage with a balancer or mineral support, while a **performance horse** may need additional concentrates to cover energy and nutrient **Click to find out more** demand.

**Complete horse feed** can be useful when owners want a simpler system, especially if they are managing limited forage quality or a busy feeding schedule. Even so, many horses still do best with forage as the main part of the ration, because it supports the digestive system and helps avoid too much starch in the diet.

As a rule, concentrate feeding should meet a need, not become the default. If the horse can maintain a healthy **condition score** on forage and sensible management, extra concentrates may not be necessary.

## Horse feeding rules every owner should know

Proper **horse feeding rules** are important for keeping horses safe, consistency, and lasting health. The widely cited **10 rules of feeding horses** are commonly outlined in different ways, but the guideline remains the same:

supply feed with the horse's digestive system in mind, not just simplicity.

These are useful rules every owner should follow:

- Base the ration on forage first.
- Switch feeds gradually to protect gut health.
- Adjust the feed to workload, body condition, and age.
- Do not give too much starch, especially in cereal-heavy diets.
- Provide fresh water at all times.
- Feed according to daily intake, not guesswork.
- Use the feed label to check starch levels, fibre content, and nutrient profile.
- Divide concentrate meals into smaller portions when needed.
- Maintain a regular feeding schedule.
- Reassess the ration whenever workload, body weight, or condition score changes.

These **horse feeding rules** are not just about avoiding digestive upset. They support nutritional balance, stable energy, and a healthy appetite. High starch levels can upset the hindgut, while too little fibre can compromise chewing and gut function. The best feeding plans always match the horse's natural patterns.

## How to read a horse feeding chart

A **horse feeding chart** is a useful beginning guide for planning daily intake. It allows you to estimate how much roughage and concentrate a horse may need based on **body weight**, **workload**, and **condition score**. It is not a strict rule, but it gives structure to feeding decisions.

Most charts begin with the horse's estimated body weight and then adjust feed amounts depending on whether the horse is a idle horse, light worker, moderate worker, or performance horse. A horse with poor body condition may need a adjusted feeding approach from one that keeps condition readily.

When using a **horse feeding chart**, start with these steps:

- Calculate the horse's body weight as accurately as possible.
- Evaluate body condition score to judge whether the horse is underweight, ideal, or overweight.
- Consider workload and how much exercise the horse truly does.
- See whether forage alone meets the horse's needs.
- Include concentrates only if the chart and condition suggest they are necessary.

Charts are useful, but they should never replace observation. If the horse is getting thinner, becoming lethargic, or showing signs of poor coat quality or digestive upset, the ration may need changing. A sensible feed plan responds to the horse, not just the numbers.

## How much does horse feed cost?

**Horse feed cost** varies depending on the kind of feed, brand, formulation, and **bag size**. A small sack might appear more affordable at the till, but the cost per day or per feed may be higher than with a larger bag. So checking unit cost matters more than looking at the label price alone.

Brand, nutrient density, and ingredient quality all affect price. Some **horse feed companies** make specialist performance or conditioning feeds that cost more because they contain higher-quality ingredients, added

supplements, or carefully controlled starch and fibre levels. Others offer basic fibre feeds or utility mixes that may suit simpler rations.

If you want to estimate spend, a **horse feed calculator uk** can assist with likely monthly costs based on feed amount, bag size, and price per bag. This is especially useful if you are comparing a complete feed with a home-blended ration.

To make cost decisions easier, look at:

- Cost per kilogram
- Feed quantity per day
- How long a bag lasts
- Whether the feed replaces other supplements
- The amount of forage needed with it

A feed that seems expensive may actually be economical if it reduces the need for extra supplements or performs better in terms of condition and digestibility.

## Horse feed advice for beginners

If you are new to ownership, **horse feed for beginners** should focus on simplicity, safety, and consistency. Start with forage, learn the horse's normal appetite and behaviour, and only add extra feeds if there is a clear reason. Good **horse feed advice uk** usually begins with the basics: forage quality, water, body condition, and the horse's work pattern.

For beginners, a **bucket feed** can be a straightforward way to deliver a measured ration. Keep it simple: one main feed, a sensible quantity, and no sudden changes. A complex mix of multiple concentrates and several **supplements** can be harder to manage and may create imbalances.

A helpful starter method is:

- Set forage the base of the ration.
- Choose a feed suitable for the horse's age and workload.
- Check the label for starch, fibre, protein, and feeding rate.
- Introduce any new feed over several days.
- Monitor body condition score regularly.

When people ask for the "best" beginner ration, the answer is often a plain one: a sensible forage-first plan, plus a straightforward complete feed or balancer if needed. That lowers the chance of overfeeding while still meeting the horse's needs.

## Choosing the right feed for your horse's workload and condition

The right **horse feed** depends on workload, **body condition**, and how the horse uses calories each day. A horse with low activity usually needs fewer calories and less concentrate. A horse in moderate or hard work may need more **energy**, more **protein**, or a feed with a higher digestible energy value.

Workload should always be assessed realistically. A horse that hacks once or twice a week does not need the same ration [overweight horse feed](#) as a **performance horse** in regular training. Overfeeding can lead to excess weight and poor condition score, while underfeeding can reduce performance, recovery, and overall welfare.

**Scoops** can be a useful way to measure feed, but they should be standardised as much as possible. Different products weigh very differently per scoop, so always check the actual weight rather than relying on volume alone. This matters especially when managing a **feed ration** for a horse that needs precise control.

As a basic principle:

- For easy keepers, prioritise forage and a low-calorie balancer.
- For horses needing more condition, look at conditioning feeds and fibre-rich concentrates.
- For performance horses, choose feeds that support energy without excessive starch.
- For horses with poor digestive tolerance, favour fibre and lower starch levels.

The most effective ration is the one that supports the horse's workload while preserving body condition, digestive comfort, and steady energy.

## Frequently asked questions on horse feed and concentrates

### What is the difference between horse feed and concentrates?

**Horse feed** is the broad term for anything fed to a horse, including roughage, compound feeds, and balancers. **Concentrates** are a certain kind of feed that supplies more energy and nutrients in a smaller amount than forage, and they are usually introduced when the horse's diet needs extra support.

### Is it possible to feed a horse only forage?

Yes, many horses can be fed only **forage** if it is good quality and available in enough quantity. A forage-only or forage-based diet can be effective for a maintenance horse, but some horses with greater exercise demands, low body condition, or specific nutritional needs may require more concentrates or a complete horse feed.

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### Is complete horse feed identical to concentrates?

Not in every case. **Complete horse feed** can sometimes function as a concentrate, but it is formulated to provide a more rounded nutrient profile. Some complete feeds are designed to be fed as the core ration alongside forage, while other concentrates are simply energy-dense additions to the diet.

### How much horse feed should I feed?

Use a **horse feeding chart**, your horse's **body weight**, current **condition score**, and actual **workload** as your guide. Start with the manufacturer's feeding advice, then adjust based on the horse's progress, appetite, and body condition. A **horse feed calculator uk** can also help estimate daily use and cost.

### What horse feed is best for a beginner owner?

The best **horse feed for beginners** is usually a straightforward, forage-led ration with one appropriate feed rather than several mixed products. A plain balancer, low-starch complete feed, or fibre-based bucket feed often suits new owners well. Follow **horse feed advice uk**, use clear feeding rules, and make changes gradually to protect gut health.