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# Catering for Horses Today

## Forage verses concentrate – top 10 tips

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1. The horse's digestive tract tells us about his ideal diet - small stomach that produces acid continuously; fast passage rate; enlarged hindgut where fibre is fermented. Horses are meant to eat fibrous diets, chewing for about 17 out of 24 hours
2. Feeding the horse with his natural diet in mind results in a healthier horse with less risk of digestive and behaviour problems, and a higher likelihood of reaching optimum performance
3. Cornerstone of feeding = a balanced diet, or one that supplies all the essential nutrients required every day
4. Think - Forage first, other feeds and supplements only to make up for shortfalls in the forage
5. UK forage rarely provides a balanced diet, even if it is enough to maintain condition, because most are short of some minerals. Preserved forages are short of some vitamins, as well as minerals
6. Forage-only diets must be supplemented with minerals, and in some cases, vitamins
7. Compound feeds (bagged commercial blends) balance the diet *only* if fed at the full recommended rate; therefore if this is too much to maintain a healthy weight, a multi-spectrum vitamin and mineral supplement should be fed alongside
8. Hay vs. Haylage? Preserved forages vary widely in nutritional content, and ideally analyse to find out. Well-made early-cut hay may be more nutritious than late-cut haylage! UK hay will contain some dust and mould spores, no matter how well made and should be soaked (briefly) before being fed to stabled horses. Haylage may be lower in sugar than hay, contrary to common belief
9. Hay can be soaked for a few hours to reduce nutritional content for overweight horses and ponies (but it is still sensible to have the hay analysed to know the starting point)
10. Avoid fasting for over four hours to reduce the risk of stomach irritation and ulcers, and aim to feed forage ad lib (apart from to overweight horses and ponies)

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