

Haylage for Horses

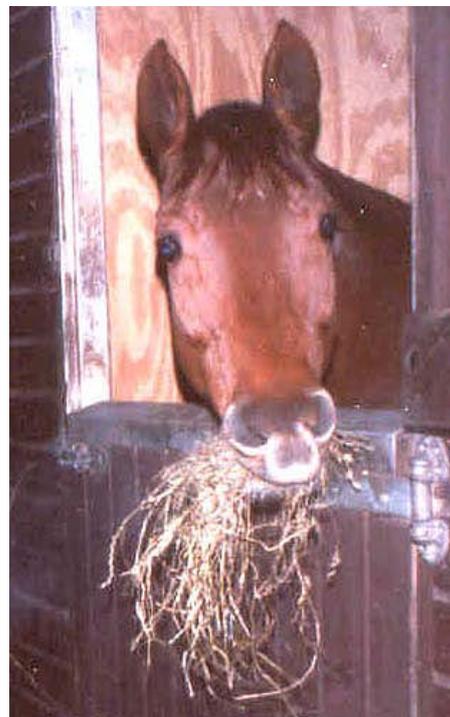
The natural alternative to grass

Horses need adequate fibre in their diet to keep their large intestine working properly and, traditionally, in the winter period, this has been supplied by hay. But acquiring hay of consistent quality has always been a problem as the horse is a fussy feeder and will reject poor quality material, especially if there is an unusual smell or significant moulding present.

Poorer quality hay is low in nutrients and could cause severe long-term health problems due to the presence of moulds. The low moisture content of hay (about 10%) allows the mould spores to become airborne which may cause an allergic respiratory disease called 'Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease' (COPD) – commonly known as 'broken wind', 'dust cough' or 'dust allergy'. Already up to one in every five horses suffers from some form of dust allergy.

Once a horse has been affected it will never recover and will always need special attention to minimise exposure to 'dust.' For instance it will be necessary to soak hay prior to feeding, a tiresome, labour-intensive task that leaches out nutrients leading to a further reduction in the hay's nutritional value and may still not succeed in controlling the disease.

Many equine nutritionists now recommend feeding haylage instead of hay. Haylage is much closer to the horse's natural diet of grass, both in texture and nutritional value – it is more palatable and digestible than hay, has a higher nutritional value and is less dusty. If made properly it will contain few, if any, mould spores and its higher moisture content (about 40%) helps prevent any spores that are present from becoming airborne and causing problems.



Advantages of haylage vs hay

- Haylage is dust free – healthier and no need to soak
- Haylage bales are denser – less storage required
- Haylage bales are wrapped in polythene – can be stored outside
- Haylage is more palatable than hay – more enjoyable and less wastage
- Haylage has a higher nutritional value – need less purchased feed
- Haylage is a more natural feed and more easily digested
 - horses prefer wetter forages (many horses dip their own hay)
- Haylage is more cost-effective



Buying haylage

- Haylage bales come in all shapes and sizes
- Always buy your bales from a reliable source
- An unopened haylage bale will only go mouldy if air gets into it during storage so make sure the bales you buy are tightly wrapped with at least 6 layers of polythene, preferably 8, and that there are no holes in the wrap.

Feeding haylage

- Once a bale has been opened it should be used as quickly as possible as exposing it to air means there is now the potential for moulds to develop. Mouldy haylage should not be fed to horses but provided the moulding is not severe it can still be fed to cattle – if it is very mouldy dispose of it.
- Sometimes on opening you see tiny white/cream round 'colonies' on the grass blades and stems. They have a creamy consistency to the touch, not powdery or fluffy. These are yeasts, not moulds, and will not do any harm to horses as they do not produce spores. Many horse probiotics actually contain yeasts.



Changing from hay to haylage

The large intestine contains bacteria to help digest the fibre in feeds. They are very sensitive to changes in the diet so make the switch gradually, say over a week, to allow the bacteria time to adapt. This should prevent stomach upsets.

You also need to get used to handling haylage so as not to over or under feed your horse. A typical 500 kg 16hh riding horse requires a minimum daily roughage intake of about 1% bodyweight, ie 5kg of hay, or, due to its higher moisture content, 7 to 8.5kg of haylage. But although you need more haylage by weight you need much less by volume as, again due to its higher moisture, haylage is much denser than hay. At the beginning it is best to weigh out the required amount each day until you get used to judging it.

Haylage dry matter has about 10% higher nutritional value than hay so if you are feeding the equivalent in terms of dry matter, you can also cut down on supplementary feed as less will be needed to meet the horse's energy requirements.

Cost of haylage vs hay

Haylage is often considered more expensive than hay but that is in terms of fresh weight consumed – if its higher nutritional value is taken into account there is really little difference, it may even be cheaper on a total feed cost per day basis, and it has additional health and welfare benefits.

Haylage – economical, easy to use and it's better for the horses too!

How to make good haylage even better

Haylage is much better than hay for your horse but it can be made even better!

Haylage is preserved by a natural fermentation brought about by lactic acid bacteria. The fresh crop contains a mixture of different types of these bacteria but the ideal types for making haylage are present in relatively small numbers. In addition each bale tends to ferment slightly differently leading to a lot of bale variability and hence inconsistency in the feed (not desirable with horses).

Haylage is much less prone to moulding than hay but once exposed to air it will eventually become mouldy. Haylage bales are wrapped in polythene to keep the air out during storage but when opened for feeding air gets in again. An opened bale usually needs to be used up within a few days.



One way to improve haylage is to apply DOUBLEACTION ECOBALE to the grass at baling. DOUBLEACTION ECOBALE contains two natural bacteria to help control the fermentation as well as potassium sorbate, a food and feed approved chemical preservative, to help reduce moulding. Potassium sorbate is the world's more commonly used preservative and is in many of the most popular foods and beverages – look at the labels on some of those you drink – so it is very safe. It is part of the well proven DoubleAction range of forage additives launched by Ecosyl Products in 2001.



Benefits of DOUBLEACTION ECOBALE treatment:

- **Faster, more efficient fermentation resulting in more stable haylage with reduced nutrient losses and improved palatability**
- **More consistent fermentation so reduced bale variability**
- **Reduced risk of moulding during storage**
- **Delayed moulding of a newly opened bale, extending the safe feeding period**

DOUBLEACTION ECOBALE is a totally safe treatment

ECOSYL
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