

# The Meaning of Grass-Free Feeding for Horses

A **grass-free diet** involves planning a horse's diet without regular access to grazing, so the ration must deliver everything the horse would normally receive from pasture. That changes the role of **horse feed** from a simple top-up to the main source of nutrients, energy, and often a significant amount of fibre. In practical terms, the diet has to work as a **replacement forage** or, at minimum, a reliable **forage substitute** alongside hay, haylage, or other conserved fibre.

A grass-free setup may work for horses in stabled management, horses on restricted grazing, or horses that need tighter control of calorie intake and bodyweight. The key is not simply to "feed more", but to formulate a **balanced ration** that supports the **digestive system**, maintains **intestinal health**, and delivers enough **protein, roughage, vitamins and minerals**, and suitable **energy supply** for the horse's workload and condition.

Because grass normally contributes to a **diet based on forage**, removing it means the rest of the ration must be more carefully planned. The most important consideration is whether the horse needs maintenance, conditioning, or performance support. A good grass-free plan should aim for steady **feed balance**, stable **daily calories**, and feed that is appropriate for the horse's **bodyweight**, temperament, and digestive sensitivity.

## Varieties of Horse Feed to Use Without Grass

You can find several **types of horse feed** that may be used in grassless feeding, but they are not the same. A few are designed to provide the bulk of the daily ration, while others act as **supplementary feed** to back up a forage-based diet. Choosing the right option depends on how much conserved forage the horse consumes, how much energy it requires, and whether you want a reduced-starch or more energetic approach.

A **complete horse feed** is one of the most useful options when grass is absent. It is created to supply fibre, calories, protein, and vitamins and minerals in a one ration, although it still usually works best alongside dried grass or fermented forage. A complete feed can be useful for horses that have difficulty with chewing long fibre, older horses, or owners looking for a more straightforward feeding routine with fewer separate parts.

A **mixed feed** is a wider term for rations combined from cereals, fibre sources, protein ingredients, and added trace minerals. Some compound feeds are formulated for performance, others for leisure horses, and others for horses that hold weight easily. They can be beneficial where a horse needs more targeted support for conditioning or exercise, but the **nutritional specification** should always be examined closely.

**Chaff** is an additional helpful part of grass-free feeding. It provides time spent chewing, supports moderate intake, and can enhance palatability when blended with other ingredients. Chaff is particularly useful for horses that need a calmer eating pace or a bit more volume without too much starch. It can also support saliva production, which is beneficial for digestive comfort.

Other common options feature **balancer** feeds, which provide dense vitamins, minerals, and amino acids with limited calories, and fibre-based feeds such as **fibre cubes**. For some horses, especially those on controlled diets, a balancer plus forage and a small amount of chaff may be enough. For some others, a more substantial feed is needed. The ideal choice depends on exercise level, body condition, and the ration's overall nutrient content.

## How to Create a Balanced Grass-Free Ration

Developing a grass-free ration starts with the basics: conserved forage first, then concentrated feeds or balancers only as needed. Good **horse feeding rules** always place fibre at the centre of the diet, because the horse's gut is

designed for almost constant consumption of roughage. Even without grass, the aim should be to support the digestive tract working steadily with regular fibre meals and sensible feed rate control.

A practical way to plan the ration is to use a **horse feeding chart** as a guide for bodyweight, condition, and workload. Charts are useful for broad planning, but they do not replace observation. Every horse has individual **daily requirements**, and those needs change with age, season, workload, and metabolism. A horse in light work may need far less concentrate than a horse in conditioning or active training.

A **horse feed calculator uk** tool can help calculate the amount of feed and forage needed, especially when working out total energy and nutrient intake. It is a useful baseline for assessing feed rate and identifying whether the horse is underfed, overfed, or receiving too much sugar and starch. However, calculator results should always be checked against the horse's body condition score and actual health.

**Digestible fibre** is especially important in grass-free feeding. Fibre is not just "bulk"; it is an important energy source for many horses and supports stable gut function. If the ration is based on hay, haylage, alfalfa, beet pulp, chaff, or fibre cubes, the horse can still receive adequate fuel without relying heavily on cereal-based feeds. This is often preferable for horses needing calmer behaviour, better digestive comfort, or lower starch intake.

A well-built ration should consider the following:

- Conserved forage as the foundation of the diet
- Whether a complete horse feed is needed or a balancer will do
- The horse's bodyweight and body condition score
- Workload, conditioning goals, and daily requirements
- Protein quality, vitamins and minerals, and overall nutrient density
- The level of sugar and starch in the complete ration

The result should be a balanced ration that supports energy, muscle maintenance, and gut health without creating unnecessary digestive stress.

## Horse Feed for Beginners: What You Need to Know

**Horse feed for beginners** should be simple, consistent, and appropriate for the horse's real needs. A lot of new owners feel unsure about choosing the "best" feed, but the first step is always getting to know the horse in front of you. A sound feeding plan is based on condition score, workload, age, and the quality of available forage, not on packaging claims alone.

Reliable **horse feed advice uk** sources tend to highlight the same core point: begin with forage, then add feed only to fill gaps. If a horse is maintaining condition well on hay and a balancer, there may be no need for a richer compound feed. If the horse is losing weight, lacking energy, or needs more support for work, then a more concentrated feed may be appropriate.

**Body condition score** is one of the most valuable tools for beginners. It helps you see whether a horse is too thin, ideal, or carrying too much weight. In grass-free feeding, this is especially important because a horse's calorie intake can rise quickly if feed choices are too rich. Frequent scoring helps you adjust the ration before problems develop.

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**Feeding frequency** also matters. Horses tend to do better with smaller, more frequent meals than with large concentrates in one go. This supports a more balanced digestive system and can cut the risk of digestive upset. For some horses, three or more daily feedings are ideal; for others, two may be enough if the ration is mainly forage-based and the horse is not in hard work.

Beginners should remember that horse feed should fit the horse, not the other way around. A calm cob, a poor-doing thoroughbred, and a veteran with dental issues may all need very different solutions. The safest approach is to make changes step by step and keep the ration predictable.

## Assessing Horse Feed Companies & Well-Known Brands

There are many **horse feed companies** providing grass free nutrition options, and choosing a brand often comes down to the feed's purpose rather than the logo on the sack. A good comparison begins with the **ingredient list**. That list shows whether the feed is primarily fibre-led, cereal-based, high in oil, or designed as a balancer or complete ration.

For instance, **spillers horse feed** is widely known for offering a broad range of products for different types of horses, from balancers and fibre feeds to condition and performance options. So it serves as a useful example of how a brand may provide multiple feeding routes rather than one universal answer. When comparing any brand, look at whether the feed is suitable as a main ration, a partial ration, or a supplement.

Its **nutritional specification** is far more important than marketing language. Check the stated levels of energy, protein, fibre, oil, starch, sugar, vitamins and minerals, and any added probiotics or prebiotics. These figures tell you how the feed supports conditioning, recovery, and gut health. A feed with good palatability but poor nutritional balance may tempt the horse without meeting its daily requirements.

Brand comparisons should also account for the horse's feeding style. Some feeds are highly palatable but more energy-dense, while others are designed to be lower in starch and better suited to a controlled ration. Ask whether the product is intended for maintenance, weight gain, topline support, or improved fibre intake. That keeps the choice practical and aligned with the horse's needs.

## How High Does Horse Feed Cost?

**Horse feed cost** differs considerably depending on whether you are buying a balancer, a complete feed, a compound feed, or a specialist fibre product. When asking **how much does horse feed cost**, it is better to consider in terms of day-to-day feeding rate and overall ration cost rather than bag price alone. A lower-cost bag may not be economical if the horse needs a big amount each day.

**Budgeting** for grass-free feeding should include forage, concentrates, and any extras such as balancers or supplements. A horse on a simple ration of hay plus balancer may cost less to feed than a horse needing a rich compound feed, but the total depends on bodyweight, condition, and workload. Calculating cost per day gives a much clearer picture of what the ration really costs.

The **daily feeding rate** is especially useful for comparison. If one feed is fed at 1 kg a day and another at 4 kg a day, the lower bag price may not be the cheaper option overall. It is also important to factor in wastage, storage, and whether the feed replaces part of the forage allowance or is only an addition.

For many horses, the most cost-effective ration is not the cheapest feed but the best match. A [feed for laminitis prone horses](#) well-designed balanced ration can reduce waste, improve condition, and avoid overfeeding calories the horse does not need. That can save money in the long run and support better health.

# Horse Feed Blend Recipe: When to Make One and How

A **horse feed mix recipe** can be practical when you want to mix a few simple ingredients into a workable grass-free ration. It is most relevant when you understand the horse's needs and want a custom mix based on fiber, body condition, and digestibility. For many horses, the core of the mix will be forage plus a **balancer**, with other ingredients added only if needed.

A simple mix might include **oats** for quicker energy, **fibre cubes** for digestible volume, and chaff to improve chew time and palatability. This can suit some horses in light or moderate work, especially when additional calories are needed. However, oats are higher in starch, so they are not suitable for every horse, particularly those needing a low-starch ration.

When making a mix, the aim is not to create the most complex recipe, but the most appropriate one. A fibre-led blend can often provide a better energy source for horses that need sustained fuel rather than a sharp release. If the horse already gets a good balancer and enough forage, the mix may only need a small amount of cereal or conditioning feed.

Use custom mixes cautiously. Every ingredient changes the overall nutrient density, sugar and starch profile, and feed rate. If in doubt, simplify the ration rather than complicate it. The best horse feed mix recipe is the one that supports fitness, appetite, and digestive stability without drifting away from the horse's real requirements.

## Common Nourishment Mistakes to Avoid

One of the most frequent mistakes is ignoring the basic **horse feeding rules** and depending too heavily on hard feed while failing to supply enough fibre. This can disturb the digestive system and raise the risk of poor gut function. A forage-first approach remains the most secure foundation, even when a horse is not on grass.

**Sudden diet change** is another major risk. Any change to forage, compound feed, balancer, or fibre feed should be introduced gradually. Horses need time to get used to new ingredients and a different ration balance. Abrupt changes can unsettle appetite, manure quality, and overall comfort.

**Colic** is a real concern when feeding is poorly managed. While colic has many causes, unstable routines, too much starch, and low fibre intake can all contribute to digestive stress. Consistent feeding frequency, plenty of digestible fibre, and careful transitions help reduce risk.

**Starch** should be watched closely, especially in horses that become excitable, reactive, or prone to digestive sensitivity. High-starch feeds can suit some working horses, but many do better with fibre-led nutrition and more measured energy release. Overdoing starch often leads to more problems than it solves.

Other mistakes include:

- Feeding feed that does not match the horse's body condition score
- Picking a product without checking the ingredient list and nutritional specification
- Giving too much too quickly instead of following sensible feed rate guidance
- Ignoring forage quality when planning the ration
- Thinking all complete feeds are interchangeable

Good feeding is steady, measured, and based on observation. That is the simplest route to better health and better results.

## FAQ: Grass-Free Horse Feeding Questions

## What horse feed is best for grass-free feeding?

The best horse feed depends on the horse's body condition, workload, and digestive sensitivity, but many horses do well on a forage-led **complete horse feed** or a balancer plus forage. If the horse needs more calories, a compound feed or fibre-based conditioning feed may be more suitable. The ideal choice should support a balanced ration, good palatability, and stable gut **overweight horse feed** health.

## Can a horse to be fed entirely on complete horse feed?

A few horses can be managed largely on complete horse feed, especially if they also receive adequate forage and the product is made to fulfil daily requirements. However, most horses still thrive from some hay or haylage because fibre remains key to digestive function. A complete feed can be the main concentrate, but it is not always a full substitute for long fibre.

## How can I use a horse feed calculator UK tool?

A **horse feed calculator uk** tool is usually used by entering the horse's weight, exercise level, and sometimes body condition score. It then calculates feed and forage amounts and helps you decide whether the ration is overly rich or too light. Use it as a guide, then tweak based on the horse's condition, appetite, and performance.

## How should I feed my horse if it has no access to grass?

If a horse has no access to grass, feed it a fibre-first ration built around hay, haylage, or another suitable forage replacement. Add a balancer, complete horse feed, or compound feed only as needed to meet daily requirements. The aim is to provide digestible fibre, vitamins and minerals, and the right energy source without too much starch.

## How much can horse feed cost per day?

Daily cost depends on the type of horse feed, the feed rate, and how much forage the horse needs. A balancer-based diet may be modest in daily cost, while a performance compound feed or conditioning ration can be costlier. The most accurate way to judge horse feed cost is to total the full daily feeding rate, including forage and any supplementary feed.