

Horse feed compared with concentrates: a straightforward distinction

The simplest 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 provide extra **energy**, **protein**, or other nutrients in a smaller volume than forage.

Forage is at the core of most equine diets. It includes grass, hay, haylage, and other fibrous feeds that supply **roughage** and promote the horse's **digestive system**. Concentrates, by contrast, are usually lower in **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 thoughtfully 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 expression **types of horse feed** includes a wide 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 formulated to provide for the horse's nutritional needs when fed as the main feed 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 blend a fibre base, a conditioning source, and a vitamin and mineral supplement to create a tailored **feed ration**. Others prefer 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 are:

- **Complete horse feed** for straightforward feeding and balanced nutrition
- **Conditioning** mixes for horses that need weight or topline support
- Low-energy fibre feeds for simpler management
- Performance feeds for horses with higher 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 should they be used?

Concentrates are rations that deliver more nutrients 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 simpler for the horse to process and absorb.

Concentrates are not automatically “better” than forage. They are simply denser 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.

Types of horse feed explained

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

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Chaff is cut fibre, often made from straw, hay, or alfalfa. It is useful to 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 compact, uniform feeds made from ground ingredients. They are simple 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 plenty of horses, the answer is yes: a horse can live on **forage** alone, as long as the forage is high quality and available in sufficient amounts. Horses are built to eat **roughage** for much of the day, and a **forage-based diet** helps with 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 do well on forage with a balancer or mineral support, while a **performance horse** may need extra concentrates to cover energy and nutrient demand.

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

As a rule, concentrate feeding should answer 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 that every owner should know

Good **horse feeding rules** are vital to ensure safety, consistency, and ongoing well-being. The famous **10 rules of feeding horses** are often summarised in different ways, but the guideline remains the same: approach feeding with the horse's digestive system in mind, not just convenience.

Below are straightforward rules every owner should follow:

- Base the ration on forage first.
- Switch feeds gradually to protect gut health.
- Tailor the feed to workload, body condition, and age.
- Avoid excess starch, especially in cereal-heavy diets.
- Provide fresh water at all times.
- Set feed amounts by daily intake, not guesswork.
- Use the feed label to assess starch levels, fibre content, and nutrient profile.
- Split concentrate meals into smaller portions when needed.
- Follow a regular feeding schedule.
- Review the ration whenever workload, body weight, or condition score changes.

These **horse feeding rules** are more than simply avoiding digestive upset. They promote nutritional balance, stable energy, and a healthy appetite. Excess starch can upset the hindgut, while too little fibre can compromise chewing and gut function. The best feeding plans always follow the horse's natural patterns.

How to read a horse feeding chart

A **horse feeding chart** is a useful beginning guide for planning each day's ration. It helps you approximate how much forage and concentrate a horse may need based on **body weight, workload, and condition score**. It is not an exact formula, but it adds structure to decision-making.

Most charts begin with the horse's rough body weight and then adjust feed amounts depending on whether the horse is a idle horse, easy worker, moderate worker, or performance horse. A horse with poor body condition may need a different feeding approach from one that holds weight easily.

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

- Determine the horse's body weight as accurately as possible.
- Check 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 losing weight, becoming less energetic, or showing signs of poor coat quality or digestive upset, the ration may need adjusting. A sensible feed plan responds to the horse, not just the numbers.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost changes with the product type, 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. That is why comparing unit cost is more useful than comparing the shelf price alone.

Brand, nutrient density, and ingredient quality all affect price. Some **horse feed companies** make specialist competition or conditioning feeds that cost more because they contain higher-quality ingredients, added supplements, or carefully controlled starch and fibre levels. Others focus on basic fibre feeds or utility mixes that may suit simpler rations.

If you want to estimate spend, a **horse feed calculator uk** can help calculate 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:

- Unit price
- Feed quantity per day
- Bag longevity
- Whether the feed replaces other supplements
- How much hay or forage it needs too

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.

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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 approach is:

- Make forage the core of the ration.
- Select a feed appropriate for the horse's age and workload.
- Inspect the label for starch, fibre, protein, and feeding rate.
- Bring in any new feed over several days.
- Assess body condition score regularly.

When people ask for the "best" beginner ration, the answer is often a simple one: a practical forage-first plan, plus a straightforward complete feed or balancer if needed. That cuts 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 honestly. A horse that hacks once or twice a week does not need the same ration 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 general 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 exactly is the difference between horse feed and concentrates?

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

Can horses live on forage alone?

Absolutely, 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 suitable for a maintenance horse, but some horses with higher workload, low body condition, or specific nutritional needs may require additional concentrates or a complete horse feed.

Is complete horse feed identical to concentrates?

Not necessarily. **Complete horse feed** can sometimes function as a concentrate, but it is formulated to provide a broader nutrient profile. Some complete feeds are designed to be fed as the primary ration alongside forage, while other concentrates are simply high-energy 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 reaction, appetite, and body condition. A **horse feed calculator uk** can also help estimate daily use and cost.

Which horse feed works best for someone new to horse care?

The best **horse feed for beginners** is usually a simple, 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.