



Dr. Carey Williams is the Extension Specialist in Equine Management for Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension. Her research focus is in equine nutrition and exercise physiology. She coordinates "Ask the Expert", a feature of the Equine Science Center website. Questions appearing here also are featured on the website.

Q I would like to know if feeding horses common vetch for hay is safe. I know some of the varieties are poisonous but this one is not. I believe this is a mixture of Kentucky Blue Grass and timothy hay. I feed round bales so I have free choice of hay in the winter months only. During the summer, my horses are on pasture.

A There is very limited information on feeding Vetch to horses. There have been some trials wherein it was fed to donkeys with good results. It seems to be used commonly in Australia and Mexico. It is a high protein legume and indeed it should be fed in limited amounts to reduce risk of obesity. I could not find a complete nutrient analysis (ie: calcium and phosphorus content) for it. Most of the studies I could find used a mix of common vetch and oat hay, which would probably be comparable to your bluegrass/timothy mix. The grass/oat hays would dilute the protein and energy content somewhat so that free choice feeding would not be as great a concern.

I strongly suggest that you get a complete nutrient analysis run on your bales, especially if you are feeding broodmares and foals. Your local extension agent should have a hay corer for taking representative samples. Go to <http://www.equi-analytical.com/> for details on sampling and submission of forages for analysis.

That being said, I usually do not recommend feeding round bales to horses unless the bales are in a covered area and in feeders kept off the ground. There is a significantly increased risk of botulism otherwise. I recommend that you vaccinate your horses against botulism if you are using round bales. Also, make sure the bales do not become moldy if left outside too long. It is best if you can go through the round bales quickly without letting them sit for weeks at a time.

Answer provided by Dr. Sarah Ralston, VMD, Ph.D., dACVN, Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

Q My husband was clearing out a Wisteria plant, and he didn't think about the potential consequences of throwing the cut remains of the plants over the fence and into an area where our four horses could get to them. Now 3 of the 4 horses are acting funny, i.e. not wanting to eat. I am very worried about them. Could you tell me if Wisteria is poisonous to horses, and if so, what can I do about it?

A It does appear that Wisteria is moderately toxic to animals and more toxic to humans. Some of the symptoms would include digestive upset, or colic, which is what sounds like your horses are suffering from. Hopefully your horses have not consumed a large amount of the plant, but you need to get them seen by a veterinarian.

In the future you can provide plenty of fresh hay and/or other feed to deter your horses from eating something they shouldn't. Most horses will not consume toxic plants if given the option of other forage. Most toxic plants are unpalatable and give off a bitter taste and/or smell.

Answer provided by Carey Williams, Ph.D., Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

Q We want to plant some type of slow-growing plants on a bank outside of a newly made riding arena. I'm afraid to plant something that could possibly be toxic. I would like to plant a running juniper, which would take over the bank but not be a problem to manage. I have had mulch placed there but I need a stabilizer to keep the mulch from washing down into the arena. What do you suggest?

A Junipers are indicated as toxic in many plant references. Therefore, I would tend to err on the side of caution and avoid planting any juniper species near a paddock or arena.

Depending on the slope length and gradient of your bank, you might consider terracing or geotextiles in combination with grass plantings for stabilization. I suggest you contact your local USDA Natural Resources

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Conservation Service (NRCS) office or the local soil conservation district and seek their advice for steep slope planting. The NRCS staff has specialists that deal with erosion and sediment control.

Answer provided by Bill Bamka, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Burlington County Associate Professor/County Agriculture Agent, Field and Forage Crops.

Q My horse, a 22-yr. old Arab, has recovered rather well after founder and a few nasty abscesses. We're back to a regular exercise program, but recently, during a stretch of very hot and humid weather, he lost the ability to sweat, and at the same time, showed signs of dehydration. I have started him on a supplement designed specifically for this condition. Could you please describe anhydrosis? Can anhydrotic horses be worked as long as they are cooled down properly? Is it a good idea to give them electrolytes, or not?

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www.esc.rutgers.edu**

A Anhydrosis – the absence of the ability to sweat – is a big problem in all disciplines. However, it is more prevalent with endurance-type horses. Supplementation with an electrolyte replacement after the horse has worked hard will also help. Unfortunately, not much is known about how to prevent the condition. There is only one other supplement that is proven to help decrease the severity and incidence of anhydrosis; just do an online search for “anhydrosis supplement” and it will pop up.

As for your specific question, horses that do not sweat can still be ridden. Just be careful not to overdo it. If you are too hot and miserable to enjoy the ride, he will probably be as well.

It is extremely critical that you take care in the cooling out process and monitor your horse's vital signs. Lots of shade and ventilation are necessary when cooling anhydrotic horses out. Hosing under the belly, chest and between the legs is also crucial.

More information on horses undergoing heat stress is available in our fact sheet on stress (FS656); it covers a bit on anhydrosis as well.

Answer provided by Carey Williams, Ph.D., Rutgers Cooperative Extension.



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