

Are You Ready for a Horse?

Get horse ready! Review this checklist to see if you and your farm are ready for a horse.

By Lisa Munniksma

Photos courtesy Brad Bixler

Lisa Munniksma, managing editor for Hobby Farms and Hobby Farm Home magazines, is the owner of Rooster (shown in both photos above), a 5-year-old Quarter horse that she's owned for about three years. Before you bring home your horse, consider this checklist to be sure you're really ready:

Shelter: Some horses require more shelter than others. This depends on your climate, their health, their age and their breeding. In general, a three-sided shelter that acts as a wind-break is adequate for most horses. If the shelter has a concrete floor, you'll need to be sure it's well-bedded (see below) or you can line the floor with rubber mats.

Safe, sturdy fencing: Barbed-wire fencing is not recommended for horses, as this can cause serious injuries if they were to become tangled in it. Read "Farm Fencing" by Carol Ekarius for details about fencing options.

Turnout area for adequate exercise.

Clean, constant water access: Whether you have a creek in the field, an automatic waterer or good, old-fashioned water buckets, constant access to drinking water is important for horse health.

Quality, mold-free hay or year-round access to forage: Read "Grazing the Surface" for information on managing your pasture.

Supplemental grain: The majority of a horse's nutritional needs should be provided by forage, but some horses require grain to supplement their diets.

Halter: You'd better get an extra halter, because it's likely to break or get lost at the least convenient time. If you plan to leave the halter on your horse while he's unattended, be sure it's made of leather or has a leather break-away strap. A horse can be injured if its halter gets caught on something in the field.

Lead rope: Have an extra of these, too.

Wheelbarrow and pitchfork: You know what these are for, and horses have a way of making a lot of it.

Bedding: If your horse is going to spend a lot of time in the shelter, you'll want to bed it with wood shavings, straw or other bedding materials to absorb waste and provide a cushion.

A basic first-aid kit: This should include a thermometer, a stethoscope, a hoof pick, bandage scissors, tweezers, a pocket knife, a flashlight, sterile saline solution, povidone-iodine solution, rubber gloves, triple-antibiotic ointment, non-steroidal eye ointment, oil-based lubricant, sterile absorbent pads, gauze roll, self-adhesive wrap, duct tape, instant cold packs, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in paste form, your veterinarian's contact information, and an equine first-aid book. Your veterinarian can recommend additional items and instruct you on how to use these properly. Store this in a mouse-proof container in an easy-to-access place.

A good relationship with a veterinarian who works on horses: You should get to know him now, before you need him in an emergency situation.

A good relationship with a farrier: Horses' feet need routine care. A general recommendation is to have their feet trimmed every four to eight weeks, depending on how fast they grow and what the horse is used for.

Transportation for your horse or a good relationship with someone who is able to transport your horse in an emergency: Sometimes horse injuries or illnesses require a visit to the veterinary hospital, and you want to be sure you have a way to get him there if needed.

If this is your first horse-owning experience, check in with your veterinarian or your county extension agent to be sure your farm is ready to go before your horse arrives.

[Top](#)

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