

Cold Weather and Horses

As we prepare for colder weather, there are many things we can do to make life easier and healthier for our animals and ourselves through the winter.



Feeding/ Nourishment

stoking the internal fires

Horses are kept warm by the slow digestion of fiber, so feeding extra hay in cold weather will keep the equine healthy and comfortable. When you add more roughage in the winter (when horses naturally are drinking and sweating less), it is wise to soak the hay with water to avoid impaction. Provide water free choice and try to keep it slightly warmed to encourage drinking! I feed big, sloppy wet, warm bran mashes in winter to add moisture and often cook flaxseed jelly for the horses' mashes (see the recipe below*) Flaxseed ground, cooked or as oil is a healer of the respiratory system and digestive tract for horses, people and dogs.

Keep dogs slightly on the "fat" side if they live outside to add a layer for warmth. Do this with *healthy foods* and nourishing oils like flax. Be sure they have proper water to drink at all times.

We humans need extra water in the winter, too. We tend to drink less and therefore retain toxins in cold weather. Eating lots of raw roots like carrots, yams, parsley root, burdock - for people, horses and dogs, will keep our vitamin intake up, add enzymes to our diets and support the organs! *We build our bodies with the foods we eat.*

Preparation for the colder weather *before* it arrives helps you prevent stress in your own life and keeps everyone healthier. If you use horse blankets, wash and repair them now. Get a carbon monoxide detector *before* you start up the furnace, etc.

*Flaxseed Jelly: For each horse use one **large** handful of seeds and 2 quarts of water. Soak the seeds overnight (for 8 hours). Then bring to a boil, watching constantly! If this mixture boils over, and it tends to, it will make a gooey mess. Use a non-metal or enameled pot and wooden spoon. Stir often. Keep at a low boil for a full hour. You will have reduced the water considerably and have a thick, slimy jelly to add directly to a bran mash or hard feed of grain or pellets. Do not strain it (you can't!). Dogs love to lick the pot/spoon and it's good for them; cats, too. It can help keep hairballs from forming in felines (in SMALL amounts). Feed the jelly 2 to 3 times a week. It will help a horse shed and reduce dry, shedding hair in dogs. If you cook jelly for dogs, use the proportions above and keep the jelly in the fridge, feed a dog from one to three tablespoons of jelly in the food. People will not like to eat the jelly. It will keep for a week refrigerated.

Our Homes & Barns

Air Exchange & Containing Warmth

In all buildings that house animals or people, there is a delicate balance to be found between retaining heat and allowing the exchange of stale air and moisture for fresh air.

Plugging all drafts is essential. Weatherizing a home's windows and doorways saves money and resources. Opening curtains on South and East facing windows each morning can capture some solar heat.

Use stone and brick to absorb heat and then radiate it into the house at night. Use insulation to prevent the escape of warmth.

Opening a barn up on the southern side helps bring in the low, south winter sun for light and warmth. The barn needs a flow of air without drafts - a horse exhales gallons of moisture each day and this humid environment can breed mold, fungi and bacteria.

Deep bedding for horses retains heat and encourages rest.

Dogs **MUST** have shelter from freezing cold, wind, rain, ice... a simple dog house needs to be insulated to retain heat. You can fill the dog house with straw or wrap it in old blankets, even use reflective cushions and liners to hold body heat inside.

In extreme weather, dogs *must* be brought into the main house.

Elderly and special needs horses should be blanketed in very cold, wet and/or windy weather. While many will say "Nature provides"; *for any compromised equine* (including the infirm), capturing and maintaining body warmth under waterproof "turn out" blankets can mean the difference between life and death!

