

September-October 2021

horses^{and} people



We Share Your Passion

Twice the Love

'Mare & Foal' Masterpieces
Enrichment: Key to Good Welfare

MINDSET
FOR SUCCESS

How to
Make Good
Decisions

WORKING IN-HAND

NEW series! Get started
Reap the Benefits! **P.72**

Confidence On The Trail

Training tips for relaxed &
enjoyable trail rides **P. 80**

The COACHING SWEET SPOT

What can we learn from other
sports' best coaching? **P.60**

CHECK IT OUT!

- * The Mare Cycle, Pullout Poster
- * How to Avoid Fencing Injuries
- * New Recommendations on Helmet Use

Treatment Trimming & Time to Heal

A sacred trinity for injury
rehabilitation success **P.48**

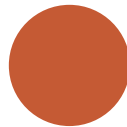
BUILDING YOUR LAND'S RESILIENCE

Help your pastures bounce back
after extreme weather events **P.28**

CHECK OUT THE HORSES AND PEOPLE WEBSITE TO ACCESS OUR MASSIVE ONLINE RESOURCES



Enriching, Enjoyable Healthy, Sustainable



WORDS BY Jessica Morton

Intense weather events such as increased flooding, extended droughts, wildfires, heatwaves, and agricultural decline are already happening. Storms like those experienced in Germany and Belgium this year are becoming more common and more devastating. The prediction is that extremes of heat, dryness and rainfall will expand floodplains and fire zones even further over the next decade and will impact the lives and the homes of millions of horses and people.

But it is not all doom and gloom. The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that the efforts being made to mitigate climate change are already having a measurable and positive effect. It can seem daunting but every effort, however small, adds up.

Let's contribute and keep them going!

To do this, first we need to collectively acknowledge the damaging impact that overgrazing and the associated loss of biodiversity and our topsoils has on the environment, and then we need to take steps to prevent it.

Overgrazing is the main reason why horses have long been considered detrimental to rural farmland, but Jane and Stuart Myers, founders of The Equicentral System, believe it is a human-made problem. If management is the problem, by changing our management strategies we can be part of the solution.

Our vision is to help horse owners create tiny pockets of biodiversity with their horses, turning on its head the idea that horses do nothing but damage the environment

"Horses can be extraordinarily good for the land when managed appropriately. It is horse people who can be bad for the land" says Jane. "Our vision is to help horse owners create tiny pockets of biodiversity with their horses, turning on its head the idea that horses do nothing but damage the environment."

Maintaining healthy pastures is part of the solution

Rehabilitation of overgrazed pastures can provide climate benefits like better resistance against heatwaves and drought, and more resilience against natural disasters like flooding.

A horse management system like The Equicentral System can hugely improve the quality of your pasture, reducing the impact of barren patches, mud, weeds and dust during times of climatical upheaval.

Contrary to traditional 'set-stock' horse keeping, where horses graze uncontrolled in the same field, The Equicentral System divides paddocks into several small ones and rotates turnout so pasture can rest until grass reaches a certain length.



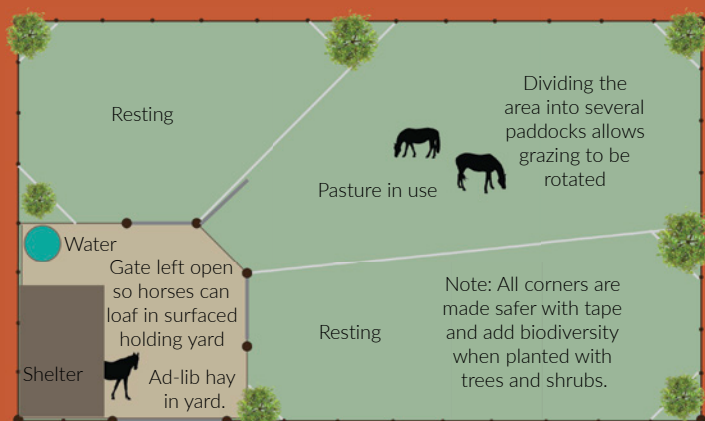
The Equicentral System basics are simple to understand and implement, yet they provide so many benefits! From a single small acreage paddock to a large-scale professional setup, the system can be adapted and will work in almost any situation and climate.

From this... (Without The Equicentral System)



B

To this... (With The Equicentral System)



To find more resources go to:
www.equiculture.net

IMAGE A: Jane and Stuart Myers devised The Equicentral System has turned on its head the idea that horses do nothing but damage the environment. Photo by Linday Zupanc.

IMAGE B: The Equicentral System is a complete horse management system. It capitalises on natural horse behaviours and can help every horse owner create tiny pockets of biodiversity.

IMAGE C: Horses don't just like freedom, friends and foraging - they need it for their mental and physical wellbeing. Image sourced from dreamstime.com.

IMAGES C & D: The Equicentral System in action! The horses voluntarily leave the pasture and move to the surfaced yard to 'loaf'. Photo C courtesy of Kaye Weaver. Photo D courtesy of Kristen Stine.



A surfaced holding yard is used to confine horses when the grass in their pastures becomes too short, or climatic events such as heavy rain or drought stress the land excessively.

Why use a holding yard?

Many smallholders with horses like to keep their animals outside in all types of weather, but by doing so, horses can damage forage plants and delay recovery and regrowth.

Overgrazing encourages weeds to infest pastures and reduces the value of the grazing land as a source of feed. Furthermore, poor grazing conditions increases the risk that intestinal parasite larvae will be ingested as horses graze.

"The traditional way of keeping horses is to keep them inside over winter because the fields are so muddy and turn them out over summer. We teach the complete opposite of what people have always been told. Horses should graze on longer grass and paddocks should be rested before they are grazed bare. This can only be achieved by keeping the horses off grazing pastures periodically – especially during hot, dry periods." says Jane.

Dusty, barren fields can cause nasty respiratory conditions (such as heaves) from aspirating irritating particles, bacteria, and viruses into the horses' sensitive lungs. In periods of significant rainfall, mud and flooding can also be a problem for horse farms. Mud harbours bacterial and fungal organisms, and soggy pastures will soften horses' hooves, worsening any cracks and splits and making them susceptible to stone bruising, abscesses and thrush.

Utilizing a holding area and paddock rotation system allows the grass to recover and grow, encouraging forage plants to grow deeper roots that can retrieve deep soil moisture and nutrients. Strong plants help create a healthier ecosystem where insects and birds thrive.

Since shelter, water, hay and grain are all found in the holding yard, the rest of the land is spared before it is overgrazed. Plant recovery and regrowth can therefore reduce the impact of environmental events, such as drought or flooding, without significantly increasing financial burden.

Horse-centric husbandry

Creating a holding yard suitable for horses requires patience, time, and resources - but the effort and expense will be well worth it in the long run

As horse owners, we all have a legal responsibility to ensure our horses do not suffer distress during a climatic event, and we also have a moral responsibility to protect the environment. By confining horses when times get tough, battered pastures can be rehabilitated, resulting in a better soil biome and an improved grass yield in the future.

Some horse owners may be tempted to take a 'wait and see' approach, hoping climatic change doesn't worsen in their area, but by doing this, they may risk both the natural environment and their horse's health. Take into consideration just the cost of potential veterinary bills for sand colic or respiratory related troubles that increase during a drought, and you will realize setting up a holding yard is a wise investment.





IMAGES A & B: We can offset deficits of the holding yard environment with enrichment activities to encourage natural behaviors.

IMAGE C: Without a central yard and shelter to rest under, horses will stand under trees.

IMAGES D & E: Pasture management is mostly about monitoring grass length and ground cover.

Image A and D sourced from shutterstock.com. Images B, C and E by Linda Zupanc.

Enrichment ideas while rehabilitating pastures

Holding areas can be stifling for some horses who suffer from a lack of physical and emotional stimulus. Luckily, we can offset deficits of the holding yard environment by employing enrichment activities that can provide an outlet for their natural behaviors, encouraging mental stimulation and improving psychological welfare.

Enrichment for horses in confinement can be as simple as adding some company, offering slow-feeding forage and water sources in a more natural way, or scheduling a one-on-one trick training session.

Social creature comforts

Horses are highly social creatures that form long-lasting bonds with their companions. They have a basic need to connect with other horses and engage in mutual grooming and play for their well-being (loafing).

Holding yards should be large enough to prevent any resource guarding and aggression while encouraging loafing activities. If horses cannot live together in one area, putting up fencing that allows them to see and touch each other over the top rail can be safe and very helpful for their wellbeing.

When deciding where to position the holding yard, consider a spot where there's plenty of activity so the horses can feel part of the action. Horses have been shown to experience reduced stress levels when soft classical music is played for them, so setting up an audio system that they can listen to some soothing tunes may be beneficial when turnout time is limited.

Protect the trees

Jane notes that while shelter is imperative to horses, just having trees and hedges in a holding area is not enough. "Forcing horses to stand out in the sun, wind or rain with no shelter is definitely a welfare issue. But using only trees is an environmental issue (though of course it is better than nothing). When horses stand around the base of a tree because it is their only source of shade, they will eventually kill it.

Horses can be extraordinarily good for the land when managed appropriately. It is horse people, not horses, who can be bad for the land

In contrast, when horses can access a man-made shelter in the central yard, they will use it. Another benefit is that horse owners don't need to invest money building separate shelters in each paddock – and the trees are spared too.

Feed the boredom monster

Horses are usually extremely food motivated, and therefore food is a powerful enrichment tool for confined horses. There are many fun ideas to employ that will encourage your horse to work for his food and challenge his mind when he can't spend hours free-foraging. Some of these can be modified depending on the dietary requirements of your horse.

"A holding yard should never be compared to the isolation of a stable, it should be a place where horses can hang out with friends and take part in mutual grooming and play - a place where resources like food and water are always available, along with shelter and protection from insects" says Jane.

To enrich the holding area, you can integrate multiple feedings, and hang up hay nets in different areas that will take much longer to consume than hay on the ground. You can also offer different types of feed in different areas (e.g., a pan of soaked hay pellets in one corner and a hay net hung up elsewhere).

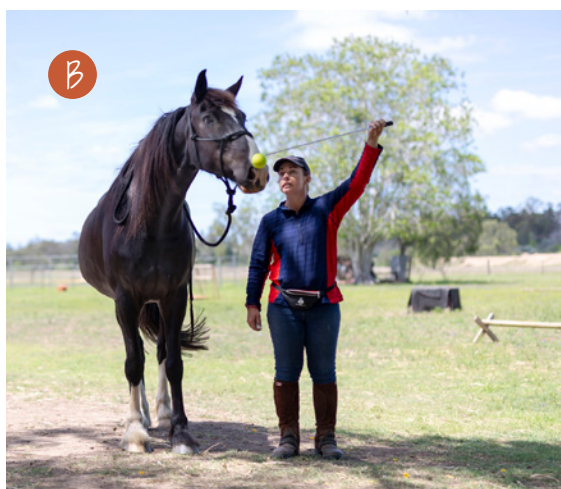
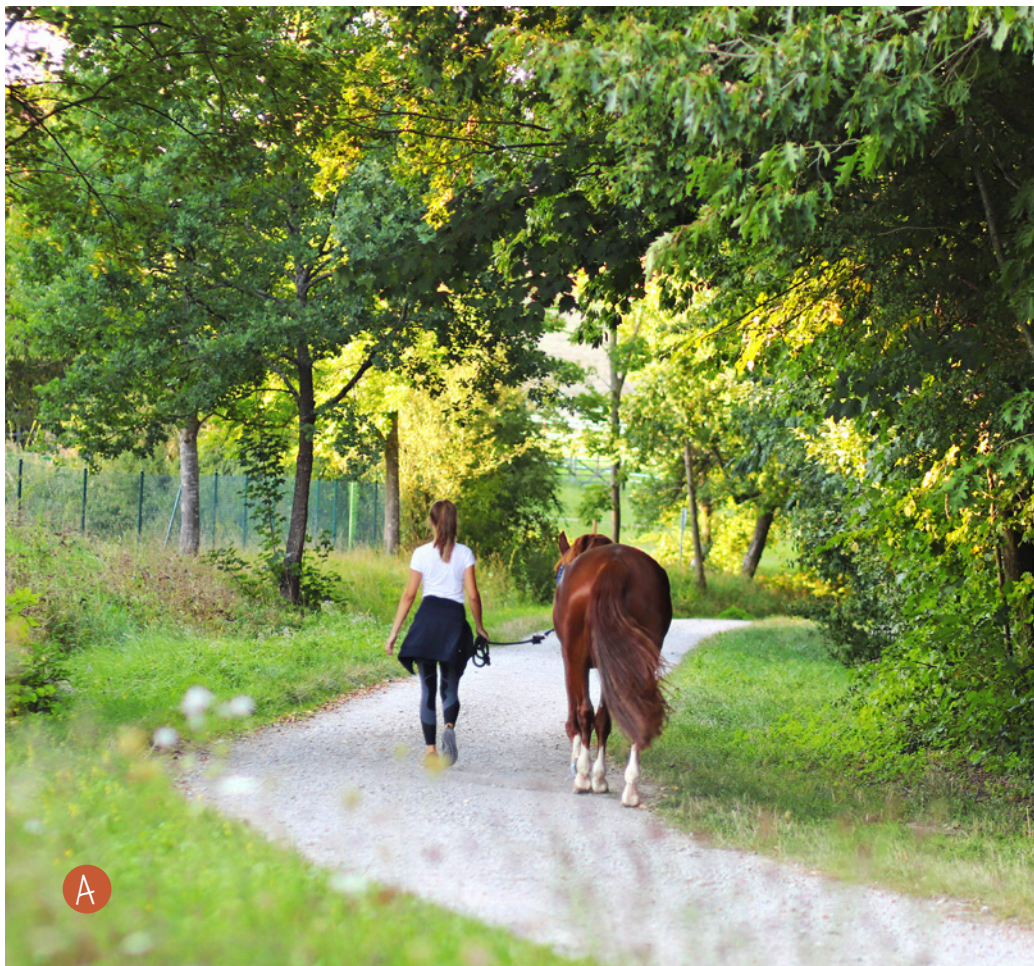
Think outside the box (quite literally) and leave a pile of horse-safe branches in the holding yard that can be nibbled on – you can even hide snacks underneath to make the game more fun or create a treat scavenger hunt by hiding fresh fruit, vegetables, and herbs throughout the area. A simple branch feeder (see image B) will engage your horse in some healthy neck stretches!

IMAGE A: Hand-walk your horse for some healthy exercise and a wonderful all-round experience for the senses. Image sourced from shutterstock.com.

IMAGES B & C: Clicker training and target training will improve your skill as a trainer and make your interactions enriching for you and for your horse! Photos by Michael Zupanc.

IMAGE D: Strategically placing logs and large boulders inside the paddock or yard encourages the horses to walk longer distances. Image courtesy HIT Active Stables.

IMAGE E: Gravel surfaces stimulate your horse's proprioception and hoof health. Photo by Linda Zupanc.



Stimulate the senses

Corridors and laneways are high traffic areas where soil gets compacted and grass can't grow. They are best avoided but if you need to create a laneway to connect pastures with your central yard, try to keep them level by following the land contours or add a surface (e.g. gravel and/or stones) to prevent soil erosion. Stones and gravel surfaces stimulate the horse's proprioception and encourage healthier hoof horn to grow.

To encourage more movement without fencing tracks, you can place very large rocks and logs inside the paddock (these can double as scratching stations!) and plant trees and shrubs in small fenced enclosures. These create natural obstacles that mimic the environment of free-ranging horses.

Toy time

Many horses love to play with interactive toys, especially when they are confined to a holding yard. A fun home-made toy can be created from a big plastic barrel with a secure lid. Simply drill some holes in the side and fill it with treats. When the horses roll the barrel around the holding area, it becomes a snack dispenser.

Kids paddling pools are a safe source of fun – enhance the experience by filling it up with water and chucking in some pieces of carrot or apple inside to create an equine version of bobbing for apples, challenging your horse's mind while satisfying his love for treats and keeping him hydrated!

Other great toys for horses include gigantic rubber balls, tires, traffic cones, trick feeders and scratching posts fixed to different points of the holding area. Each toy offers much-needed mental stimulation and exploratory play.

Brain training

Enrichment training combined with careful horse management simulates your horses and provides them with a safe and interesting life. Horses should have fun with their handlers and riders, regardless of discipline or age. Just like dogs, mental training can be even more fun and engaging as physical training. If you're interested in a good challenge that could bring you and your horse closer, clicker training might be it. There are a myriad of fun tricks and basic stretches you can teach your horse to bring a little light-hearted fun and playtime to your horse's life.

Hand walks with just a halter and lead rein are wonderful all-round sensory experiences for horses; encouraging them to explore and investigate new things, see different sights, and hear different sounds. These walks can have an enriching effect on your horse's life and strengthen the bond you share.

Negotiating the new normal ethically

Is it possible to utilize the power of pasture management to mitigate some of the dramatic effects of overgrazing during periods of climatical change? Jane believes horses are the answer.

"Many people are re-evaluating their lives and making drastic changes about the way they live. "There is an increased interest in sustainability and environmental issues after months spent in lockdown – and horses can and should be part of this exciting new movement.

"We all need to prepare ourselves to adapt to a warmer, more turbulent climate. Amid devastating-sounding statistics, small changes like restricting turnout during tough times will make a difference in your local environment, and those differences in just a few years will add up.

"Rather than referring to retired horses as oxygen bandits or paddock ornaments, we can start to think of our horses as advantageous to counteracting the climate crisis.

"Horses are being used in rewilding projects around Europe precisely for this reason. They are good for biodiversity, and they are an essential part of a working ecosystem."

Jane believes that if the thousands of small acreage farms designated for horses are allowed to rebound in a managed way, wildlife corridors can be created that were not there before.

This will mitigate the negative effects of intensive farming operations which scare away wildlife and damage the environment, while managing rural land in a way that's effective and ecologically friendly.

It's official. With good management, horses are here to stay and can help us save the world simply by doing what they do best... horsing around!

Looking to make a management system change that helps the environment?

Start here:

1

Create a surfaced central area

This can double up as a riding arena. Oftentimes arenas are hardly used, so consider reutilizing this space during periods of drought as a holding area.

2

Learn about land management

You don't have to be an expert, just basic self-education about what causes plants to grow and how to prevent soil escaping into local waterways to be lost forever is a great start.

3

Learn about horse behavior

Sometimes you need to unlearn what you've been told all your life first! Horses need to be able to make choices themselves, whether it be about companionship or where and when they want to graze or move. Do you remember how you felt in lockdown when you were closed up in the house and could only take one hour of exercise a day?

For horses it is even worse. Some human beings are perfectly happy spending time alone but horses are herd animals that require the safety and companionship of their peers to feel secure.

4

Take the Free Course <https://www.equiculture.net/equiculture-free-mini-course>