

HORSE CARE MYTHS & TIPS

Drink Up

Water is life. Each cellular function is contingent upon it. So, keeping your horse hydrated is pivotal to every aspect of his well-being and performance. Moreover, horses can't throw up. Their digestive systems are very rudimentary. In fact, with a little bellyache or constipation, they can die within hours. Truth is, keeping a horse drinking promotes proper digestion. Here are some ways to not only lead your horse to water, but also to make him drink. Yes! You can.

Monitoring Intake

First, you need to keep tabs on how much your horse drinks on a daily basis. When you enter each stall, look at the water. If your horse is not drinking normally, it is an early and important indication that the animal is getting sick. Or, that he is already ill.

For that reason, if a stall has an automatic waterer, I recommend still using buckets. I want to be certain how much the horse is drinking. Plus, I need to know the water is always clean enough to be delicious. Good old-fashioned buckets work best for these purposes.

You never, ever want to leave a horse without plenty of water. If in the morning there is less than a half of a full-sized bucket of water, that horse needs another or to be topped off later each night.

Good Positioning

Make it easy for the horse to do the right thing. To encourage drinking, place buckets in the front of the stall. Horses hang out where they can watch the aisle. So, they are more apt to remember to drink there. When I groomed at the Pan Am Games in the Dominican Republic, one horse got IV fluids twice for being dehydrated. His buckets were in the back of the stall and he never went there. When buckets are in the front, it is also easier to check their levels.

Promote Dunking

If the horse dunks his hay, he wets it. Read: he gets more water intake, making digestion easier and minimizing the propensity for colic. So, I put hay under the water. It may give him a bright idea. Buckets with hay in them are heavier to dump, but it is a small price to pay.

Before dumping the buckets, you can

rub the hay around the inside of the bucket to wipe off slime before rinsing.

Keep It Clean

Encourage drinking. Clean water is more inviting. Hay can ferment in water, which is not good. So, as a daily routine, scrub the buckets with your hand, a brush or hay. Once a week, clean them with a brush and dish detergent. The same goes for troughs outside. When it is super hot out, dumping buckets twice a day encourages increased drinking.

Make It Easy

After work, let the horse drink before grooming or rinsing him off. If he is really hot, walk until his breathing settles down. Then, let him take five gulps or so. If he is not done, walk a bit more and then offer more water. The conservative route is let him drink, but not more than half a bucket at once. The same goes with watering after a long trip.

A big tub outside the barn or at the trailer can assure hydration is a priority. Again, be sure the vessel gets cleaned at least once a day.

Play the Game

The idea is to assure the horse gets enough water into his system. Here are some routines:

- Bran Mash – Most horses get a bran mash with plenty of extra water at the end of the week. The fluid and fiber help lubricate and flush the digestive tract. Let the bran expand before feeding and figure more water is better. Mash should be soupy.

- Beet Pulp – This should soak for hours in lots of water before feeding. Once it expands, the bucket should have lots of extra water. More is better.

- Wet Grain – Only feed wet bran. It needs to expand before being ingested. Otherwise, it can absorb digestive juices and create a blockage. Horses die from such things.

- Soak Hay – Hay that has had time to absorb water brings more fluid into the animal, making digestion easier. It also washes out carbohydrates. A lot of jumpers get soaked hay so they can benefit from the nutrition and fiber without gaining weight.



You can lead a horse to water and make him drink. This article shares how to assure your horse keeps hydrated.

Electrolytes

Given daily, electrolytes can help promote drinking and maintain mineral levels. However, changes should be made gradually. If it is super hot and you up the electrolytes, the horse won't increase his water intake immediately. So, it can actually dehydrate him. Your best bet is to get and stay on a routine. I prefer feeding electrolytes rather than those put in their water. In my experience, clean water is always your best bet. In addition, a salt block in the stall helps the horse regulate his own needs.

Travel Tricks

Drinking is negotiable. This is handy to know when shipping long distances or in the heat. After traveling several hours, horses should drink. However, they don't often relax enough to do so. Plus, gas station water can be yucky. It is best to bring your own. So, here's how to make sure they drink, regardless:

- Dengie is a hay substitute with molasses in it. If you put that in some water, they go crazy wanting to drink it up.

- Apple juice also works. If you put a small bottle of apple juice in half a bucket of water, they drink. A good habit is to travel with small apple juice containers. Once they've had their fill, toss the sweetened water. You don't want it to ferment.

Nightcap

Some horses don't drink well and/or

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are prone to colic. Especially for those horses, preventive measures can save lives. At night check, a good option for them is wet hay and soup. A bit of bran and a little grain in a feed bucket full of water gets more water into them. That's your best defense. So "soup up" older horses, poor drinkers and those prone to colic.

Health

Keeping horses hydrated promotes good health. Monitor their habits and changes to prevent and avert problems. Make it easy for them to want to drink. With sound watering routines and a keen eye, you minimize risk of lethal colic. Better yet, you can know your horse is well hydrated, to keep the good times rolling. ■



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