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Help your horses survive the winter

NEWARK, Del. — Rainy, muddy winter days mean you get less use from your horse, but it needs even more care, according to Melvin Reitnour, extension equine specialist at the University of Delaware.

Your horse will probably get less exercise than it's used to getting. You should provide exercise facilities, Reitnour says.

The horse will need adequate, well-aired, clean shelter. To prevent thrush, which is an unpleasant, bad-smelling problem of the horse's feet, keep the stall clean and dry.

If thrush occurs, treat with recommended medication. Also, check the stall for loose and protruding nails and other sharp edges that can cause troublesome wounds.

Is your stable well-aired?

If you go into the stall in the morning and notice an overwhelming smell of ammonia while the moisture fogs your glasses, your stables need ventilation. A well-aired stable will help you escape the cost of eye and respiratory problems with your horse, too.

Feed your horse according to its needs, Reitnour recommends. It should have access to clean, non-freezing water. Don't allow it to range over manure piles. Neither cold weather nor the heat of fermentation will destroy worm eggs which could reinfect the animal.

By this time you should have had your horse treated for internal parasites. A horse should not be expected to go through the winter feeding a horde of un-

necessary parasites. Worm every six to eight weeks with anthelmintics which are effective against the internal parasites, strongyles, bots, ascarids and pinworms.

Good management will help control internal parasites. Clean the stall daily, and remove manure from the barn area. Spread manure on crop land but not pastures.

Clip pastures with a rotary mower so that the grass is about four inches high. Chain drag pastures to spread manure piles.

Do not over-pasture horses. Allow an acre for each horse. Keep pastures well fertilized for maximum growth and nutrition. Lime to maintain a pH of 6.3-6.5.

Also, ask your veterinarian about vaccinating horses against

various encephalitic diseases and any other treatments that are needed, and about the parasitic control program best suited to your horse.

A number of horse skin problems usually crop up each fall, Reitnour noted. They're probably caused by fungi; talk to your veterinarian about treatment.

Make sure the fungi are not carried over in the gear to cause a new infection. Clean, disinfect, repair and renew all the gear.

Winter is a good time to get your horse's feet taken care of, Reitnour says. Keep hooves trimmed and even. Remove the shoes if you don't plan much riding or work for your horse this winter.

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