

## Horse Essentials

**Selection.** First-time horse buyers should seek help from knowledgeable and experienced 4-H adult leaders, Extension Horse Specialists, local veterinarians, professional trainers or other knowledgeable horse industry individuals, when making decisions concerning horse selection. Younger and less experienced riders/handlers typically need to be mounted on older and more experienced horses. It is well accepted knowledge in the horse industry that young, inexperienced youth and young horses are a poor fit. Failure to acknowledge this may result in frustration and/or increased chances for injury to the rider/handler. Other factors to consider besides age and amount of training include: cost, riding discipline, health, temperament, conformation, quality of movement, breed, color and gender. The first horse a 4-Her has should be suited to the interests of that young rider, and for that reason, a seasoned, sometimes semi-retired horse that has been ridden, shown and hauled many miles makes a good project horse. These proven horses are not intended to be a project for the entire 4-H career, but simply a solid starter horse that can hopefully contribute to positive early experiences and even some success by a young 4-Her. It is logical to expect that a dedicated 4-Her may need a total of two or three horses, in order to transition through the program with emphasis on safety, education and competitive success. As a 4-Her gains experience and ability, the progression to a younger, less experienced or perhaps a more challenging, more competitive athlete is expected. A big challenge is to avoid over-mounting a green rider and under-mounting an experienced rider. There are far too many good-minded, serviceable and athletic horses to waste time and energy on horses with limited background, ability or suitability for youth riders. In the selection process, resist the temptation to quickly become attached to every horse that is on the market. Research on the horse's temperament, success for past owners, previous training, show record, health history, and specific abilities are all important in making a horse project decision.

**Facilities.** When planning to build or remodel a horse facility, seek help from professionals, such as the County Extension Agent, Extension Horse Specialists, members of zoning boards, inspectors, builders, and contractors. Determine the number of animals that will be housed in the facility and for what purpose. Horses housed in a barn need a stall with minimum dimensions of 10 ft. x 10 ft., and the preferred minimum size is 12 ft. x 12 ft. Stalls should be bedded with wood shavings, dirt, straw or some other material that is dust and allergen free and will absorb urine and provide a comfortable bed. Rubber mats can be used in stalls under bedding to provide cushion, decrease the amount of bedding needed and help eliminate holes created by pawing or urinating in one place. Horses housed in pastures also need shelter in the form of a wind block, as well as a place to get out of the rain. For horses that are kept in a stall, it is worthwhile to consider a turnout or 'run' attached to the stall that gives a horse some free exercise. For youth who are busy with school and other activities, this simple management practice can help keep the 'edge' off of some horses, so they require less riding time. Contact industry professionals or see Texas AgriLife Extension's horse website (<http://animalscience.tamu.edu/main/equine.html>) or reference guides for additional information on use of a lighting regimen to help keep a horse's hair coat slick and other related management techniques.

**Nutrition.** A general rule is for horses to eat approximately one percent of their body weight in good-quality hay or pasture (ex. 12 lbs. of hay per day for a 1,200 lb. horse). Good-quality hay should have more leaves than stems, be fresh in smell and appearance, have a natural color, be soft and pliable to the touch, have few seed heads and be free of insects, mold, dust and weeds. A balanced concentrate is a mixture of grains, minerals and vitamins that meets the nutrient requirements of a horse, when fed with good-quality hay. Many feed manufacturers carefully formulate their concentrates to meet the individual needs of young, growing horses, broodmares, performance horses or mature, geriatric horses. The amount of concentrate fed to horses varies with each individual according to age and metabolism, but many riding horses do well with the hay described above and then concentrate fed at between 0.5 percent and one percent of body weight per day. The amount of concentrate fed depends on the horse's age, amount of exercise, and the type of feed being provided. Meals should be divided into two or three smaller feedings that are equally spaced throughout the day. For more specific information on nutrition, visit publications on the horse page at: <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/main/equine.html>.

**Health.** Internal parasites should be kept under control, by implementing a consistent deworming program. Consult a local veterinarian to determine the type of dewormer to use and how often it should be given. Other ways to help control parasites include feeding horses from mangers or troughs instead of off the ground, picking up manure regularly from stalls, paddocks and pastures and avoiding the practice of spreading manure on pastures grazed by horses, if possible. Vaccinating horses is important, because it helps prevent illness and the spread of disease. A suggested vaccination schedule is provided by the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) at: [http://www.aaep.org/health\\_articles\\_view.php?id=171](http://www.aaep.org/health_articles_view.php?id=171). Contact your local equine veterinarian for assistance with vaccinations that are important, depending on whether your horse is hauled to shows, trail rides, clinics or just stays at home. A horse's teeth should be inspected by an equine dentist or veterinarian yearly, to determine any abnormal wear or broken teeth. A horse's hooves should be trimmed or shod by a reputable farrier every six to eight weeks.

**Management.** Horses should be groomed and have their hooves cleaned out daily, to promote good health, hygiene, and overall appearance of the coat and hooves. Basic grooming equipment includes a rubber curry comb, stiff and soft brushes, mane and tail comb and a hoof pick.

Horses should also be exercised a minimum of 15 to 30 minutes per day, in order to maintain muscle tone, stimulate appetite and help prevent other problems, such as boredom and digestive upset. This does not mean 15 to 30 minutes of intense exercise, as this thumb rule includes warm-ups and cool-downs that consist of walking, bending, and some trotting. Riding and longeing a horse are two ways to provide exercise. Basic riding equipment includes a bridle, saddle, and saddle pad. This equipment should be checked before each ride, to ensure that it is in good condition and free of dirt or other debris. Longeing equipment includes a halter and longe line at least 30 ft. long, and a longe whip may be needed for reinforcement.

**Rules.** The Texas 4-H Horse Show Rules and Regulations can be found at the following web address under 4-H Horse Projects: <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/main/equine.html>. Breed show rulebooks, such as the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA), American Paint Horse Association (APHA), Pony of Americas (POA), etc., are located on their respective websites.

**Key Publications.** free of charge at <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/main/equine.html> .

### **References.**

AAEP *Guidelines for Vaccination of Horses*. 2002. Retrieved March 27, 2007, from [http://www.aaep.org/health\\_articles\\_view.php?id=171](http://www.aaep.org/health_articles_view.php?id=171)

Evans, J. Warren. *Horses: A Guide to Selection, Care and Enjoyment*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 2001.

NRC. 1989. *Nutrient Requirements of Horses*. 5th rev. ed. Natl. Acad. Press, Washington, DC.

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