

# What young horses need from horse feed

Choosing horse feed for **young horses** is not about so much picking the “best” bag on the yard and rather about matching **growth**, body development, and temperament. A foal, a weanling, and a yearling all have different **energy needs**, even before you think about work, turnout, or breed type. The goal is a **balanced diet** that supports bone, muscle, and the **digestion** without pushing growth too fast.

In practical terms, good **young horse feeding** means enough **protein** for tissue development, adequate **mineral content** for skeletal strength, and sufficient **fibre** from **forage**. Young horses also need the right balance of **calcium** and **phosphorus**, because those minerals play a major role in healthy bone formation. If the feed is too rich in **starch** but short on fibre, the ration may fill the horse with quick energy while doing little for long-term **growth support**.

Another key point is **gut health**. Young horses are still learning how to eat, chew, and process feed efficiently, so they benefit from highly **highly digestible fibre** and a steady routine. Many owners focus on calories first, but essential nutrients matter just as much. A youngster on a well-planned feeding programme usually does better than one given extra hard feed without a clear reason.

For foals and very young weanlings, the main feed source remains milk for a time, then forage and a controlled bucket feed. As they mature into yearlings, their ration may need more energy and nutrients, especially if pasture quality drops or they are naturally lean. The challenge is not to overdo it: rapid gain can contribute to **developmental orthopedic disease** and other issues linked to fast growth. That is why a measured approach matters more than simply “more feed”.

## Types of horse feed appropriate for youngsters

There are several **different horse feed options** that can be suitable for youngsters, but each has a different purpose in the feed ration. Some are designed as a full solution, while others are there to top up forage and fill nutritional gaps. Grasping the difference helps you select with confidence rather than guessing from the label.

**Complete horse feed** is formulated to provide a broad range of nutrients in one product, usually alongside forage. For many young horses, this can be a simple option because it reduces the need to build a ration from scratch. A good complete feed often includes vitamins, minerals, protein, and fibre in one balanced recipe. However, “complete” does not mean unlimited: the quantity still needs to fit the horse’s bodyweight and condition.

**Feed for young horses** is typically tailored for growth and development. It may include higher-quality protein, added minerals, and a more careful energy profile than ordinary maintenance feed. Many feeds in this category are designed with youngstock nutrition in mind, especially for weanlings and yearlings that need support without excess starch. Always check the **feed label** for nutrient levels and feeding instructions.

**Pellets** are a common format for youngsters because they are easy to chew and usually consistent in composition. Pelleted horse feed can be more palatable and practical than a coarse mix for some horses, especially if you want a predictable nutrient profile. Pellets can also be useful when you need to control intake and avoid selective eating.

Other options include fibre-based feeds, mashes, and low-starch products. These can suit young horses with sensitive digestion or those that need a calmer energy source. The most important thing is to match the feed to the horse’s age, body condition, and daily workload, rather than buying based on name alone.

# How to pick horse feed for novices

If you are just starting with **horse feed for beginners**, start with the basics: what is the horse eating now, how is it looking, and what is the forage like? Healthy feeding is built around **horse feeding rules** that place forage first, then a well-chosen bucket feed if needed. For a youngster, the first question is not “which bag is best?” but “what does this horse actually need?”

**Forage** should form the foundation of the diet. That means high-quality hay, haylage, or both, depending on what is available and appropriate. Forage offers roughage, supports gut function, and helps keep the digestive system working steadily. In many cases, a young horse on excellent forage may need only a small amount of a targeted feed or a **feed balancer** to cover nutritional gaps.

Use **condition score** or **body condition score** as a guide. If the youngster is underweight, you may need a more energy-dense ration. If it is carrying too much weight, you may need to reduce concentrates and make better use of fibre-based feed. Condition scoring is a simple tool, but it is one of the most useful for making calm, sensible decisions.

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Beginners often overreact to a horse that seems a little slim or a bit keen. A nervous youngster may appear to need more feed when the real issue is management, turnout, or feeding routine. The best approach is to assess forage quality, body condition, temperament, and any signs of growth spurts before changing the ration.

## Horse feeding rules that every owner should follow

Strong **horse feeding guidelines** help maintain youngsters healthy and steady. They are straightforward, but they create a big difference over time. If you want an easy structure, think of these as the **10 rules of feeding horses** in everyday practice:

- Build the diet on forage first.
- Offer **fresh water** at all times.
- Give **small meals** rather than heavy, heavy bucket feeds.
- Select feed with sensible **starch levels**.
- Read the **feed label** before buying.
- Match the ration to age and workload.
- Provide **ad lib forage** where appropriate and safe.
- Promote **gut health** with regular routines.
- Assess body condition and adjust gradually.
- Carry out changes slowly to protect **digestive health**.

Those rules are especially important for youngsters because their digestive system is still developing and they are more sensitive to abrupt changes. Frequent, smaller feeds are usually more practical to manage and better for the horse than infrequent large feeds. This helps maintain steady digestion and can reduce the risk of upset.

Forage quality matters too. Hay and haylage are not interchangeable in every case, and the best choice depends on the horse and the rest of the ration. Some young horses do very well on hay plus a small amount of

concentrate, while others need haylage for extra energy and moisture. Whatever you choose, consistency matters more than constant switching.

## How much horse feed should a young horse get?

There is not one exact amount that suits every youngster, which is why a **horse feeding chart** is only a starting point. It can show broad guidance, but the final **feed quantity** should be based on **bodyweight**, age, growth stage, forage quality, and whether the horse is still at pasture or doing more structured work.

A **horse feed calculator uk** style approach can be helpful if it helps you estimate intake and avoid overfeeding. These tools often ask for bodyweight, body condition, and workload. That information can help you work out a suitable ration, but you still need to use common sense and observe the horse. A calculator cannot tell you everything about temperament, chewing ability, or whether the youngster is thriving on current management.

As a rule, smaller, growing horses and those with good forage may need only a limited quantity of bucket feed. Bigger breeds, [overweight horse feed](#) very lean horses, or those in faster growth phases may require extra feed. The amount should be increased slowly, not dramatically, and always with attention to the total diet rather than just the hard feed.

If you are unsure, begin with the manufacturer's recommended amount for the horse's bodyweight and then assess the result over time. Look at weight, topline, coat condition, energy, and behaviour. The right feed quantity is the one that promotes steady growth without creating excess condition or digestive problems.

## Should you use a complete horse feed or a mix?

That is one of the most usual questions owners must make. A **complete horse feed** can be the easiest option because it is made to provide a well-balanced ration when fed as directed. A **horse feed mix recipe**, by contrast, offers you more control over ingredients, but it also puts more responsibility on you to get the nutrition right.

For many young horses, complete feeds are a good choice because they already include the correct mix of **concentrates**, fibre, vitamins, and minerals. They can reduce the chance of errors, especially if you are managing a youngster for the first time. A good complete feed can support a **balanced ration** without forcing you to combine multiple products.

A mix may work if you have a specific reason to build the ration yourself, such as using home-grown forage or tailoring intake closely. However, a DIY mix can easily become unbalanced if the protein, mineral, or fibre content is not carefully planned. That is especially relevant for growing horses, where the wrong balance of calcium and phosphorus or too much starch can cause problems.

A practical compromise is often a forage-first diet plus a feed balancer or a complete feed in modest amounts. That gives you flexibility while keeping the nutritional profile more controlled. If you choose a mix, make sure it is built around youngstock nutrition rather than general maintenance feeding.

## When to use spillers horse feed and similar brands

There is many **horse feed companies** available today, and **Spillers horse feed** is one of the best-known names in the sector. Name recognition can be helpful, but it should not be the only reason to choose a product. Instead, compare products based on the horse's needs, the feed label, and the feeding instructions.

When you are evaluating **youngstock feed**, look at the protein source, mineral profile, fibre content, and starch levels. Some brands are better suited to calm, controlled growth, while others are designed for more energetic

horses or different work levels. A sensible **brand comparison** should focus on whether the feed fits your youngster's body condition, forage intake, and age.

The choice of brand can also come down to availability, palatability, and consistency. If a horse refuses a feed, even a nutritionally sound product will be difficult to use. Palatability matters, especially with younger horses that are still developing feeding habits. Choose something the horse will eat reliably, but do not ignore the nutrient profile just because it smells nice.

In practice, a reputable company with clear feeding guidance and a product designed for growth is often a good starting point. You do not need the most expensive option; you need the most suitable one. That distinction matters far more than the logo on the bag.

## How much does horse feed cost?

**The cost of horse feed** varies with a number of things, including which feed is chosen, the **package size**, and how much the horse actually uses each month. When people ask **how much horse feed costs**, the truth is that it varies widely according to feeding plan. A young horse on mostly forage and a small amount of balancer will be cheaper to feed than one needing a larger amount of compound feed.

To judge **value for money**, look beyond the sticker price. A less expensive bag may appear attractive, but if the horse needs a larger feed quantity to meet the same nutritional needs, the real cost may be higher. Also take into account how long a bag lasts, how many key nutrients it provides, and whether you are still needing to buy separate supplements.

Package size is important because two options with roughly equal prices can be quite different as a value once you figure out daily usage. A larger bag may work out better if the product is consumed in small quantities and stores well. On the other hand, if you only need a small amount of feed, choosing a huge bag can be inefficient if it loses freshness before you finish it.

The most budget-friendly option is not always the cheapest one. It is the diet that helps maintain healthy growth, stable body condition, and healthy digestion without unneeded supplements. Careful planning often saves money later by avoiding waste, overfeeding, and the need for costly corrections.

## Sample feeding plan for a young horse

A sensible nutrition plan should always start with forage and then introduce a bucket feed only if needed. This example is a simple **horse feeding chart** format template as opposed to a fixed recipe. Adjust it according to body condition, age, and workload.

**Forage:** Serve high-quality haylage as the main part of the daily ration, or haylage where suitable. The goal is consistent intake and adequate roughage to promote the digestive tract. Some horses do well with **ad lib forage**, while some others need carefully managed amounts to control weight.

**Bucket feed:** Include a young-horse-friendly bucket feed, balanced feed, or balancer according to the manufacturer's guidance. This should complement the forage, not replace it. If the horse is in a lean phase or has higher energy needs, a slightly larger bucket feed may be advisable, but keep meals **small frequent meals** rather than one large serving.

**Monitoring:** Assess **body condition** weekly and observe how the horse looks over several weeks rather than days. Young horses can change shape quickly, but sudden shifts are not the aim. The right plan supports even development, a good topline, a healthy coat, and calm energy levels.

**Adjustment:** If the horse loses weight, assess forage first, then increase feed gradually. If it becomes overly strong or gains too much condition, reduce concentrates before cutting forage too hard. This keeps the gut functioning and supports consistent growth.

## Common feeding mistakes to avoid

One of the biggest mistakes is **overfeeding**. Owners often think more energy means better growth, but excessive intake can do harm. Too much rich feed, especially with high **starch**, may upset the digestive system and contribute to unstable behaviour or poor body control. For a growing horse, the aim is steady progress, not fast weight gain at any cost.

Another issue is ignoring **digestive health**. Rapid changes in feed, large grain-based meals, or poor forage can all disturb the **feed for laminitis prone horses** gut. Young horses need consistency, chew time, and a ration that supports the microbiome in the hindgut. When digestion is stable, growth support is usually more effective.

**Rapid growth** is another risk. A youngster that grows too quickly may be more likely to develop soundness problems later, especially if the diet is unbalanced. That is why calcium, phosphorus, protein, and overall ration quality matter so much. The feed should support development gradually rather than forcing the horse to put on size too fast.

In conclusion, do not assume one brand or one formula suits every horse. A feed that works well for one yearling may be too rich for another. Monitor condition, performance, and behaviour, and change the ration based on evidence, not habit.

## FAQs about feeding young horses

### What is the best horse feed for young horses?

The best horse feed for young horses is one that supports balanced growth, healthy digestion, and a balanced diet. In most cases that means a forage-based ration with a reliable young horse feed, a complete horse feed, or feed balancer. Look for good protein, fibre, minerals, and sensible starch levels, and choose the option that fits the horse's age, condition, and workload.

### What amount of horse feed should a foal or yearling eat?

There is no single amount that works for every foal or yearling. Use a horse feeding chart, manufacturer guidance, and bodyweight as a starting point, then adjust by observation. The feed quantity should support steady growth without causing excess condition. A foal or yearling may need only a small amount of bucket feed if forage quality is good, while others need more support.

### Can complete horse feed be used for young horses?

Yes, complete horse feed can be suitable for young horses if it is specifically formulated for growth and fed according to instructions. It can be a practical choice for beginners because it streamlines the ration and helps provide essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. Check the label carefully and make sure forage still forms the base of the diet.

### Should I choose a balancer or a mix for my young horse?

For many owners, a feed balancer is the easier and safer option because it helps cover vitamins and minerals without adding too many calories. A horse feed mix recipe can work, but it requires more nutritional knowledge to keep the ration balanced. If your youngster already has good forage and only needs nutritional support, a balancer is often the simpler choice.

## **How do I work out horse feed cost for a growing horse?**

Start by checking the bag size, daily feed amount, and how long the bag will last. That gives you a clearer picture of horse feed cost than the shelf price alone. Compare value for money by looking at nutrient density, whether you still need extra supplements, and how much forage the horse eats. This helps you answer how much does horse feed cost in a more realistic way for your own feeding plan.