

Barn Basics

Five Winter Weather Tips

December 18, 2008

Oh, the weather outside may be frightful, but you still need to practice good stable management. Even if you board your horse away from home, check to make sure his house is winterized. Here are five suggestions to ward off winter woes:

1. Make sure your tack room door shuts properly. A warped or improperly hinged door can prove disastrous for the equipment inside. Strong winds can usher rain and snow inside. Also check for a leaky roof. You don't want a steady drip, drip, drip onto your expensive saddle.
2. How's the terrain in your horse's corral or paddock? He may have created a depression from lying down, standing or pawing in the same place over and over. If so, fill in and level the area. Otherwise your horse may end up living on lakefront property once the rain starts.
3. If you ride in the rain or snow—intentionally or not—your tack can end up speckled with water marks. Wet tack should be wiped off with a clean, dry cloth as soon as you're back at the barn. After it's dry, apply a leather conditioner. Simply doing that may restore its original appearance. To prevent water marks in the future, treat your tack with a leather care product designed to enhance its resistance to moisture. Be wary, however, of products containing silicone. While silicone creates a barrier that sheds water, it will also leave your saddle sleek and slippery.
4. Want to give your horse a dry area underneath his shelter? Typical wood shavings look nice and comfy, but only for a brief while. They don't absorb much water, so when placed on damp or muddy ground they soon become mushy and soiled. Instead, consider using pelleted bedding. One popular choice is pine sawdust compressed into tiny pellets. When exposed to moisture they swell and break down into fluffy, absorbent mounds of bedding. They last much longer than regular shavings and your horse will appreciate a barrier against the cold, wet ground.
5. Keep an eye on drainage. Have a shovel handy just in case you need to dig a trench to escort water runoff away from stacks of hay, your tack room or your horse's front door. Of course, before you begin an excavation project, consult with the barn manager if you board your horse. Chances are, though, that they'll appreciate any effort to help winterize their property.

By taking a few steps to keep your horse and your tack safe and dry, you can make it to the warmer months without any regrets. Nonetheless, chances are you'll be counting down the days to spring!