

Barn Site Selection

After you've identified what and where you are allowed to build on your property, you can decide upon the best location.

Your choice should give equal priority to drainage and ventilation. A barn situated on a beautiful spot will be a misery to you and your horses if, after an inch of rainfall, their stalls look like cross-country water jumps. Locating your barn on high ground offers the best drainage and air circulation. Wind currents blowing naturally through your barn are far better than relying upon architectural engineering to increase ventilation; however, a well-built barn will have both.

Another important consideration is whether the soil at your prospective location will support the barn, or if it needs modification. For example, in a cold weather region, too much moisture in the soil causes interior building condensation problems and is prone to frost-heave. Fill dirt can be brought in to compensate, the existing soil can be aerated and dried, or drainage tiles may be necessary. At the other extreme, silty and sandy soils with low moisture content are cohesionless and need the addition of high-quality fill to compact properly. The best way to determine this is to visit your local Land Conservation Service office and ask them to look up maps of your property and identify what types of soil exist there. Some counties have online systems where you can look up your property and gather information such as perimeter measurement, soil types, elevations and current zoning. A soil test may not be necessary if the soil types are readily apparent from the soil survey maps available from the county Soil Conservation Service. If you have enough acreage to select a barn site from several locations, soil type, elevation and the amount of excavation and/or fill needed could be determining factors.

Damage

If your site provides less than optimal drainage, you need to create it through excavation work by adding fill and compacting it until your base is approximately 10 to 18 inches above the surrounding ground. For 10 feet beyond the base, the soil should be graded down and away from the barn at an inch per foot or as required by local code. Adding gutters and downspouts helps deflect runoff but can be inefficient in a downpour where water overwhelms the system. Installing a gravel base under the eaves or burying drainage tile below the building footings will help solve this problem.

Access

Plan for easy access to the barn and enough driveway width and overhead space to admit the largest vehicle that will ever need to use it. Aside from the 10 feet of minimum space around your barn necessary to build it in the first place, be sure any driveway can accommodate pickup trucks pulling horse trailers, heavy-duty delivery trucks, tractors, hay wagons and emergency vehicles. If a building already exists near the proposed site of your new barn, plan enough clearance between them to allow access to both.

Unfortunately, ease of access to your barn is a two-way street. In this ask-no-questions eBay world, your expensive tack could easily end up in the hands of unsuspecting buyers. Security is a key reason to keep your barn area well lit at night; however, barn thieves are notoriously bold and not necessarily nocturnal. Locating your barn where you can see it from your house is a helpful security measure, but not as effective as a good lock on a tack room door.