

THE WAY OF HORSES

By Eleanor Richards
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Protect valuables from theft and contamination.

Horse owners are discovering a trip to the feed store requires an armed guard.

But once the edible "gold" is safely transported to the stable, how is it protected and stored?

As with anything of value, the chances of it being stolen is very high. In this case the thieves are usually horses and rodents.

Commercial feeds, grain and supplements must be stored in a secure location. A room, such as an extra stall, with a locking door is best. Within that room, storage containers with lids that can be locked or fastened securely should be provided. This double protection helps insure the thief will have trouble accessing the treasure.

Several types of containers are available. An old chest freezer with the latch removed (to insure a child does not become trapped) works well. Other popular containers are trash cans. Galvanized metal trash cans work best, as the steel also deters the other thieves – rodents (rats and mice).

Secure containers will also help prevent Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis. Opossums, skunks and raccoons may have the organism which causes EPM in their feces. Horses may acquire EPM when they ingest grain, forage or water contaminated with the feces.

Regardless of the type of container you choose the lid must fasten securely and be hard for a horse to remove. There is always a chance the feed room door will be left open. Bungee cords may help secure the lid.

Extra bags of feed that will not fit in the secure containers may be stacked on a platform a few inches above the ground. A wooden pallet works well. This allows air circulation around the bags. It is imperative

the feed room be securely closed at all times if exposed feed bags are stored.

Feed should be purchased fresh every 30 days and rotated. This means the containers should be cleaned completely and the oldest feed used first.

High humidity can cause spoilage and increase the chances of insects. Even feed stored in containers is susceptible to moisture. If the containers are sweating or show signs of condensation, it is possible the feed will spoil or become contaminated with insects. Insuring proper ventilation and setting up a fan will help. During the summer, when nights are cool and the days are hot and humid, purchasing and storing less feed at one time is smart.

Stables with 20 or more horses may consider buying feed in bulk. While this can be cost effective, you still do not want to store more than a month's supply at a time.

Clean the bulk bin out completely before refilling. Poorly constructed bulk bins allow the buildup of moisture resulting in spoiled feed. This spoiled feed can hang-up on the sides and may break loose at any time – contaminating the feed and causing sick horses.

No matter what type of storage you chose the area must be kept clean. Spilled feed and broken bags will attract unwanted guests.

When buying anything of value, make sure you are buying quality. The feed should not be more than a month old.

Do not be shy at the feed store...you are the customer. Check the date and refuse it if it is old or does not meet your expectations. Refuse dirty or damaged bags.

Date of manufacturing will be stated on the feed tag, stamped on the bag, or printed on the tear strip along one end of the bag. Many companies use the Julian Date Calendar. For example the date code may read: 08121. The "08" is the year – 2008; the "121" is the 121st day of the year - May 1st.

Even if the date of manufacture meets your requirements refuse or return the feed if it seems questionable.

Horses can be their own worst enemy. It is up to us to protect them from temptation.

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