

Ponies and horses can make wonderful, lifelong companions. Before deciding to acquire one, it's advisable to dedicate plenty of thought to whether you are prepared to make the time and financial commitment which comes hoof in hoof with keeping them!

Where will I keep my horse or pony?

a) AT GRASS

This is cheaper than keeping them in a stable providing there is enough grazing: as a rule of thumb, one horse/pony/donkey needs at least **one acre** of suitable pasture. It is more natural for your horse to be kept at grass with the company of their own kind, as they are highly **social** animals. The field should have secure boundaries or suitable fencing (barbwire is to be avoided!). Your horse or pony will also need somewhere to take **shade** and **shelter** – ideally a field shelter – not only from the inclement winter weather, but also from heat and flies in the summer. An area of hard standing is also great to provide a dry mud free area for equines to stand on to prevent mud related problems. Fresh water must be made available at all times. In winter you may need to put a rug on your horse and provide plenty of hay as grass may be scarce.

b) IN A STABLE

You may choose to keep your horse or pony stabled at a local livery yard where some or all your horse's needs will be looked after by the yard staff at a cost. Or you may choose to keep them at home.

An ideal size for a stable is 12' x 12' (4m x 4m) for an average small horse, 14' x 14' for a large horse, really the bigger the better as equines hate small spaces. Allowing a horse access to a small fenced area around the stable so it can come and go as it pleases is a great compromise and will help to reduce stress and behavioural problems. Suitable deep-litter bedding should be dust-free, highly absorbent and recyclable, such as shavings or straw.



The building needs adequate drainage, access to sunlight, and good ventilation to prevent respiratory disease. Fresh, clean water should be available at all times and **hay** given **ad libitum**, to provide fibre and satisfy the horse's motivation to feed (they'd spend 16 hours a day grazing if left to their own devices!). Stabled horses will also benefit from being allowed to graze and need to be taken out regularly for exercising. Being kept **isolated** from other

horses is contrary to your horse's needs and may be **detrimental** to its welfare, resulting in stress and abnormal behaviour. In absence of another equine, an animal of a different species (a goat for instance) may also make a good companion for your horse. Stables need frequent cleaning with bedding being changed at least once a week.



What equipment will I need?

- Bridle
- Saddle and accessories
- Head-collar and lead rope
- Rug (optional)

➤ **Grooming Kit:**

- Hoof pick
- Dandy brush
- Body brush
- Curry comb
- Mane comb

What will I feed my horse/pony?

If your horse/pony is kept at grass there should be enough for him to graze on, roughly one acre per horse/pony. Not all grass is suitable though, you need to make sure the grass is specifically for horses. In winter you must be prepared to supplement them with plenty of good quality hay as grass could be scarce. Equines require also access to a **salt lick** (some licks combine vitamins and minerals with salt: these are a good option if a complete food is not available). **Small amounts** of high energy hard feeds such as oats, maize or ready prepared coarse mix can also be fed to your horse/pony depending on the amount of exercise and/or work they perform.

Horses are notoriously selective grazers, so horse pasture will benefit from regular grazing down by cattle and especially by sheep, as this will control the development of scrub and weeds. Sheep grazing in the spring time will also help the natural control of ragwort.

General Health Care

All ponies/horses should be regularly **wormed** and **vaccinated**, with yearly

boosters following the first vaccination. The most common diseases to vaccinate against are equine influenza, tetanus, and equine herpes viruses.

Daily grooming is a good way to check your horse/ pony for ailments such as bumps, cuts, sores, skin conditions or foot problems, with daily picking out of the feet.

Your horse or pony will also need regular visits from a farrier, ideally every six weeks. It may just be for a trim or maybe a new set of shoes but always remember good feet, good horse!

Dangerous substances

There are several common sources of poisoning for horses. **Ragwort** is particularly dangerous, as the effects are cumulative, and the damage is permanent. Ragwort remains poisonous and becomes more palatable even after it has dried, so it even poses a risk in hay. Horses are inclined to chew tree bark and wood, so poisonous trees, such as yew, ivy and some conifers need to be fenced off, and wood that has been preserved with toxic elements or lead paint should be kept away from horses.

Stereotypies

Horses are intelligent social animals, so they are particularly prone to developing stereotypical behaviours if their environment does not contain enough to interest them. These can include pacing and head swaying behaviours.



**Caring for
HORSES
and
PONIES**



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