



UNWANTED HORSE
COALITION

What are the Costs of Horse Ownership?

Owning a horse requires both time and money, much more than just the initial purchase price.

Did You Know? The top-priced Thoroughbred yearling at the 2015 Keeneland September Sale sold for \$2.1M (<http://www.americasbestracing.net/>).

Even though you are probably not planning to buy the next Triple Crown winner, it is important to consider all costs of horse ownership before deciding to purchase one. Costs vary widely among regions of the country, yet all owners still pay for the same basic care items. Be sure to explore these costs where you live when creating your horse care budget.

Purchase Prices Range From Free to 6 Figures or More

Most recreational horses can be purchased (or adopted) for \$500 - \$3K. Performance horses used for competition might cost around \$10,000. A quick search at Equine.com will show what private sale (and rescue) horses typically cost in your state. Training, pedigree, sex, age, and past performance will all affect price.

Housing on Your Personal Property or at a Boarding Facility

Keeping a horse on your own property can come at a significant cost if you need to build a suitable shelter and fencing. Annual operating costs include repairs, electricity, insurance, pasture maintenance, and more.* Many owners choose to board their horses instead. Rates vary for pasture or stall board can range from \$75/month for self-care (owner provides feed, hay, and daily care) to \$800/month for full care stall board depending on services provided. Some training facilities charge more than \$1500/month.

Nutritional Needs (Forage, Grain, and Supplements)

Horses' dietary needs vary based on age, breed, and level of activity. In general, a horse should eat 1.5 percent of its body weight in forage (grass or hay) each day. Costs of hay varies regionally and ranges from \$3 to \$12 per square bale. Prices have increased steadily over the past several years due to drought conditions in parts of the country. The amount of hay required also changes based on season (obviously more is required in winter), availability of pasture, and turn out time. Grain is not always necessary, but can cost from \$12 - \$26 per 50lb. bag; and prices of supplements vary widely. The USDA tracks the cost of hay. See <https://www.ams.usda.gov/market-news/hay-reports> for information specific to your state.

Health and Hoof Care

Basic health care includes annual vaccines and a Coggins test, plus de-worming and/or fecal egg testing. On average, these cost \$260 annually. Horses' teeth should be floated annually, more or less often depending on age, which may be another \$100. First aid supplies for minor injuries (treating one abscess can cost \$50 in supplies) adds up, and emergency veterinary care can run hundreds or thousands of dollars. For this reason, it is advisable to create an emergency fund to cover unexpected expenses. Farrier care can cost \$30 - \$55 each trim, with front shoes about \$90 - \$120. Specialty shoes are more, and farrier visits usually occur every 4-8 weeks. Don't forget the fly spray in warm, humid climates. A 32 oz. bottle will run \$10 - \$20.

Tack, Equipment, and Gear

Some owners just enjoy watching their horses romp in the field and require little more than a halter and lead rope. Most owners, however, will want to do more with their horses. Most equipment and tack is a one-time purchase, but they will last only as long as they are cared for. Take blankets, for instance. Older horses with inadequate winter coats might need a blanket in winter, which can run \$70 - \$200. These need to be cleaned each year and many times repaired.

Show Time: Training, Lessons, Transportation, and Insurance

Although not a cost for all horse owners, many people, especially parents of horse-loving youth are unaware of how quickly these costs can add up. Even recreational riders might want to trailer their horse to the state park for an afternoon hack with friends. Keep these items and situations in mind when considering your horse ownership budget.

Breeding

We won't discuss additional costs of breeding here because the UHC believes that breeding is not in the best interest of the horse(s) of a first-time owner, and not all horses are meant to be bred. In fact, we strongly encourage new owners to consider gelding costs (\$150 - \$600) should they decide to purchase a colt or stallion (which are not recommended as a first horse either).

Euthanasia and Disposal: End-of-Life Costs

This might not be a topic that a new or prospective horse owner wants to contemplate, but it is an added cost that must be included in any horse care budget. Remember that emergency vet care fund? If your horse becomes seriously injured or ill, euthanasia might be the best option. Costs of euthanasia and disposal can run \$300 - \$500.

Summary of Costs

Category	Annual Cost
Housing – Boarding*	\$900 - \$9,600
Nutritional Needs - Forage	\$240 - \$4,380
Nutrition Needs – Grain	\$0 - \$1,440
Health Care	\$360 +
Hoof Care – Barefoot	\$260 - \$475
Hoof Care - Shoes	\$775 - \$1560 +
Other Supplies	variable

A Tale of Two Horses

To illustrate how two horses can have different costs of care even under the same circumstances, let's consider Tucker and Dawson, horses at a local rescue facility. Tucker is a 15yo American Saddlebred gelding that maintains weight on 3 flakes of hay and turn out with a grazing muzzle. Dawson is a 25yo Thoroughbred that requires free access hay, pasture time, weight gain supplements, and almost two bags of grain each week to maintain his weight. Plus, specialty supplements for hoof care. A prospective adopter should know that it will cost about \$225 more per month for Dawson's care than for Tucker's care just because the horses have different needs.

Think about this. You can take 10 riding lessons or trail rides each month for less than boarding your own horse at many barns. That's three rides a week with no other commitments or worry. To find out more ways to stay involved with horses without the commitment of ownership, read "Alternatives to Buying" in this series.

** If you plan to keep your horse on your own property, contact your state's Cooperative Extension Office for information on costs specific to facility, pasture, and manure management.*