



UNWANTED HORSE
COALITION

Basic Horse Care: Shelter

Did You Know? If horses have access to a shelter, they can tolerate temperatures as low as -40°F. (*University of Minnesota Extension*)

Horses can adapt to a wide variety of environmental extremes if they are acclimated and have adequate feed and water. Horses with free access to shelter will often choose not to use it when it seems logical they would do so. Acceptable shelter may be natural, such as trees or rock formations, or constructed, such as sheds or barns. Horses do benefit from shelter, especially if it serves as a sunshade (yes, horses can get sunburned), windbreak or provides relief from the elements.

Shelter Requirements

The shelter should be of adequate size for the number of horses using it. Adequate space discourages fighting and subsequent injury among horses that are group housed. Individual stalls in a barn should be large enough for the horse to turn around and lay down in. A 12-foot by 12-foot stall is large enough for all but the largest horse breeds. The shelter should be tall enough for the horse to be able to stand with its head held in a normal position without its ears touching the ceiling. The shelter should be adequately ventilated to help prevent respiratory tract irritation and should be free of hazards that might cause injury. Finally, it should have good footing/ traction and be well-drained.

Stabled Horses Need Exercise

All horses should be given the opportunity for daily exercise. If the horse is kept in a stall or small paddock, it should be exercised daily, weather permitting, either by being ridden or by being turned out in a large paddock, arena, or pasture. If horses normally live in large paddocks or pasture, they will generally receive adequate exercise on their own.

Winter Weather

In the absence of wind and moisture, horses tolerate temperatures at or near 0°F. With access to shelter, they can abide temperatures as low as -40°F. Horses are most comfortable at temperatures between 18 and 59°F, which varies based on the thickness of his coat and environmental factors.

Would a Blanket Work Instead?

Owners have different beliefs about blanketing. Blanketing may only be necessary to reduce the effects of cold or inclement weather when:

- There is no shelter available and the temperatures or the wind chill drop below 5°F
- The horse recently moved from a warm climate and is not acclimated to the cold
- The horse will become wet while turned out
- The horse's winter coat has been clipped
- The horse is very young or very old
- The horse's body condition score is less than 4