

Paper

Paper is usually shredded and consists of a mix of newspaper, magazines and other unwanted printed matter, with varying absorbency. Paper is a dust free and non-palatable bedding material. Depending on whether the paper is cut into long strips or short flakes could effect the time taken to muck out. The long strips tend to be harder to muck out as they all stick together and it is difficult to separate out the droppings. Bales usually come wrapped in polythene making them easy to store. Paper is one of the cheaper types of bedding, but a large number of bales may be needed to create a thick bed. Ink can also stain a light coloured coat. When wet, paper can become less user friendly and very soggy. Paper can also be very messy as it can easily blow around the yard.

Flax and Hemp

Flax and hemp bedding materials are made from the chopped stems of flax and hemp plants. This bedding material has become increasingly popular in recent years, and has a low dust content. This bedding can often be more expensive which may limit its appeal. Instances of bed eating have been reported. It is sometimes a by-product of the paper industry, which ensures a steady supply. It is a very absorbent bedding material although it does need to be watered down before use. It is packaged in heavy duty plastic bags so can easily be stored outside.

Cardboard

Cardboard is usually shredded and is another dust free bedding material. It can, however, move around the stable like paper, leaving bare patches when the horse gets up and lies down. Cardboard clumps together when wet making removal of these patches easy, but it can be difficult to separate from droppings, which can be wasteful.

Rubber Matting

Rubber matting provides excellent support for the horse's hooves and limbs minimising the risk of injury as it covers the entire floor, and provides better grip. Rubber flooring is supplied in separate mats that may interlock or in a liquid that forms a seamless floor that does not have to be lifted for cleaning.

Rubber matting is most commonly used under a bedding material. A small amount of bedding material is often added on top of the mats, which helps soak up urine and contain droppings. Rubber matting can be used with any sort of bedding and is sometimes just placed at the front of the stable by the door for the horse to stand on. Some people choose to use rubber matting without any bedding. However, this option can lead to wet floors, dirty rugs and horses. Hygiene standards need to be high and the mats will need to be cleaned underneath to prevent a build up of ammonia. Rubber matting is easy to manage and although the initial cost is high, the amount of bedding used can be greatly reduced, saving time mucking out and reducing the size of the muckheap.

HOW TO BUY BEDDING

Local feed merchants and country stores stock many different types of bedding. Bedding suppliers may deliver large amounts directly to individual yards or local stockists. Buying in bulk on large yards can help to reduce costs.

Straw is usually purchased from a local farmer, who will often deliver to the yard. Quality of straw and price per bale will vary between different suppliers.

Livery yard clients may find that the yard owner provides bedding which is included in the cost of the livery, and while this is easier, it can be difficult if you prefer to use another product.



This leaflet was sponsored by easibed virtually dust free shredded wood fibre bedding.



Welfare Department

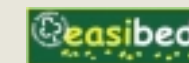
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ADVICE ON

BEDDING FOR HORSES



Different types of bedding materials are used in stables to satisfy the needs of both the horse and the carer. Poor quality bedding can have a significant impact on the health and welfare of the horse, even those stabled for only very short periods. With an ever-increasing choice of different materials now available, consideration must be given to a number of factors.

Fresh, clean air is essential for the health of the horse and its carer. Mould spores and dust present in poor quality bedding materials are unacceptable, and can result in a number of respiratory problems, not only to the horse but also to the carer. Therefore, it is vital that bedding materials are of a high quality so that dust and mould are either absent or present only at very low levels. The British Horse Society strongly recommends the use of dust and mould free bedding materials.

Bedding materials should allow easy, efficient removal of droppings, which should be done at frequent intervals. Urine should be allowed to drain freely to the base of the bed where it is absorbed and can be removed. Stable design is also important and will determine how efficient a bedding material is at draining and absorption. Some stables have drainage channels, which will also assist with the effective removal of urine.

Bedding in the stable must provide support for the horse's feet while standing and for the whole body when lying down. This is essential to prevent stable injuries such as capped hocks or elbows and to allow the horse to lie down and get up safely, without slipping. As well as helping to block out draughts, good high banks and thick bedding will also help to alleviate injury if a horse becomes cast. Injuries are more likely to occur if the stable size is too small for the horse and if the surface of the floor does not offer adequate grip.

STABLE MANAGEMENT

No matter what type of bedding material is used, it is essential that the stable is big enough for the horse to comfortably turn around and lie down without making contact with the walls.

To avoid horses standing on bare concrete or uneven stone floors, bedding should cover the whole stable floor, particularly by the door. As many horses spend long periods standing by the door it will help to alleviate the extra strain put onto the limbs and joints.

Regardless of the type of bedding chosen, it is essential that the material is of a good quality, not toxic if eaten and not an irritant to the skin. Regular mucking out and cleaning of the whole stable environment is fundamental to the on-going good health and welfare of the horse.

Bacteria resulting from decaying droppings and stale urine are potentially damaging to the horse's feet and the respiratory tract and indicate that mucking out is not sufficiently thorough. Dry, clean bedding will help to eliminate risk of thrush in the hoof and other ailments. The stabled horse's feet should be picked out on a daily basis (ideally twice a day) as a matter of good practice.

Dusty or dirty bedding is a significant health risk, not only to the horse but also to the carer, and the advantages of dust free bedding cannot be overstated.

BEDDING BASICS

There are a number of factors that should be considered when choosing a suitable bedding for both the horse and the carer:-

Waste Removal

For many yards the size of the muck heap is of great importance. The majority of bedding materials are biodegradable, but there are varying differences in the time it takes each one to rot down. There can also be significant differences in the amount of waste produce from each product when mucking out. Many horse owners have an informal arrangement with a local farmer who removes their muckheap for spreading on arable land or land grazed by sheep or cattle. Horse manure is not suitable for spreading on equine pasture due to the risk of contamination with parasites and it would make the grass unpalatable.

Storage

Products with a robust, waterproof packaging can often be stored outside, or in a sheltered area. Unpackaged bedding such as straw, needs to be stored in a cool, dry place to prevent it from becoming mouldy, dusty and unusable, such as a weatherproof barn.

Availability

The availability of certain types of bedding materials may be affected by the time of the year, the success of a harvest and the presence of suppliers in your area.

BEDDING TYPES

Straw

Straw is the most traditional bedding and has been used for centuries. There are three main types of straw available, wheat, barley and oat.

Wheat Straw is probably the most commonly used. It makes a warm comfortable bed that is easy to handle as well as allowing free drainage. Wheat straw is usually readily available, although it does tend to be the dustiest straw.

Barley Straw is often the least expensive but is not always the most suitable for horses. The ears in the straw can be very prickly and may cause skin irritations.

Oat Straw is often of higher quality and more golden in colour. However, horses can be more inclined to eat this type of straw. It also tends to be more absorbent, which can make it heavier to muck out.

Advantages

Straw is readily available, however the time of year may slightly increase the cost as harvest approaches and the stock is low.

It is a relatively cheap bedding material.

It is easy to use and dispose of.

Disadvantages

Straw can vary greatly in quality and has the potential to contain high levels of dust and mould spores.

Straw beds are rarely odourless and the muckheap can be both large and difficult to keep tidy.

Straw may not be a suitable type of bedding for horses or carers who are susceptible to respiratory disorders, or for horses who eat their bedding.



Picture: Studio B

Treated Straw Products

Treated straw products consist of chopped straw that is sometimes mixed with other bedding materials. Sometimes essential oils are also added. This type of bedding tends to be more consistent in quality than conventional straw. However it may not be readily available as it is a relatively new product. Treated straw bedding materials are supplied in wrapped bales that are easier to store than traditional straw bales. This type of bedding can be more expensive than other types of material.

Wood Shavings

Wood shavings have been a popular horse bedding for many years, and are often used for horses that suffer from respiratory disease or that tend to eat other types of bedding. The quality of wood shavings varies greatly, particularly in respect of the dust content. Dust extracted shavings are the most popular, as they are of a higher quality and have a low dust content. Low quality shavings, often a sawmill by-product, are not suitable for horse bedding as they can be contaminated with sharp splinters and other potentially dangerous waste. The brands of shaving with the largest flakes are usually produced from virgin wood and can have lower dust content. Shavings are very light and tend to blow around the stable and yard, sticking to tails and rugs. Wood shavings do provide excellent support for the horse's hooves as they compact inside them. This type of bedding is also very good for deep litter management systems. Shavings are usually packed in polythene wrapped bales, making them easy to stack and store.



Picture: Expo Life

Shredded Wood Fibre

Shredded wood fibre is a relatively new and unique product, specifically manufactured from selected recycled white wood, making it one of the 'greenest' bedding products. This product is virtually dust free and free draining, yet absorbent which helps to keep the surface of the bed dry. This type of bedding is less likely to move around, so may help to reduce the risk of injury when the horse gets up and lies down. The best shredded wood fibre brands are of a consistently high quality and are widely available. Shredded wood fibre offers support to the hooves and is easy to manage with very little waste, so producing one of the smallest muck heaps. It does not tend to stick to tails and rugs as much as wood shavings and packaging is designed for the product to be kept outside.

