

Choosing the right **horse feed** for **competition horses** is not so much about picking one “best” bag and instead about matching the feed to workload, body condition, temperament, and the type of work being done. A good feeding plan promotes **energy**, **digestibility**, recovery, and long-term **digestive health** without making the horse too keen, heavy, or difficult to manage.

The most effective approach is usually a **forage-first** one: base the diet around **forage**, then introduce the right **concentrates** or conditioning feed if needed. That can mean **hay**, **haylage**, a **complete horse feed**, or a carefully balanced combination of **types of horse feed** based on **workload** and **body condition score**. The goal is a **balanced diet** that delivers **slow-release energy**, enough **protein**, a sensible **starch level**, and excellent **fibre** content.

What performance horses need from horse feed

Competition horses need more than calories. They need **competition nutrition** that supports stamina, focus, recovery, muscle repair, and **fluid balance**. The best **horse feed** for this purpose supplies usable **power release** without causing digestive upset or unwanted behaviour changes.

The main factor is the type of work. A horse doing light schooling has very different needs from one doing intense daily training, jumping, eventing, dressage, or regular travel and competition. As **work rate** rises, nutrient density becomes more important because the horse must get enough energy and key nutrients without eating impractically large amounts of feed.

Digestibility matters just as much as calories. Highly digestible ingredients can help the horse use the ration efficiently, reducing waste and supporting stable gut function. A feed with good **digestibility** can be especially useful for horses that struggle to hold condition, need controlled weight gain, or have a sensitive tummy.

Forage-led energy is usually the safest starting point. Fibre from **forage** and fibre-rich compounds in the bucket feed supports **gut health** and steady energy. Many competition horses do well on a ration that favours **steady-release energy** over high-starch “quick energy”, because it helps maintain focus and consistency.

Protein also matters, particularly for muscle maintenance and recovery. A horse in serious work may need more high-quality protein than a leisure horse, but excess is not the answer. What matters is the quality of the overall ration and whether the horse is receiving enough amino acids alongside energy, vitamins and minerals.

In practical terms, the best feed is the one that keeps the horse:

- in a healthy **body condition**
- able to work with controlled, usable energy
- comfortable in the gut and digestive system
- keen but not overexcited
- recovering well after exercise

Kinds of horse feed and when they work best

There are various **types of horse feed**, and each has a place depending on the horse’s needs. The main options are **nuts**, **cubes**, and **mixes**, along with fully balanced feeds, balancers, and straight ingredients used in more advanced feeding plans.

Nuts are usually compressed pellets. They are often tidy to use, easy to measure, and useful when you want consistency in the **feed ration**. Many nuts are designed to be fibre-led and may suit competition horses needing steady condition without too much starch. They can also be more palatable for some horses than a plain cube.

Cubes are a familiar option and can be a simple way to feed a structured ration. Depending on the formulation, cubes may be suitable for horses needing conditioning, maintenance, or moderate performance support. They are often chosen when owners want predictable intake and easy feeding management.

Mixes usually combine cereals, fibres, and added ingredients for texture and palatability. Some horses really enjoy a mix, especially fussy or hard-working horses that need encouragement to eat. However, mixes vary widely in **starch** content, so they should be selected carefully if the horse is sharp or prone to digestive problems.

The important point is the formulation, not just the format. Two feeds can both be nuts, yet one may be higher in fibre and lower in starch, while another delivers more rapid energy. Look at **nutrient density**, ingredient quality, and how the feed fits the rest of the ration.

Choose the format that best suits the horse:

- **Nuts**: good for neat feeding, conditioning, and routine consistency
- **Cubes**: practical for easy bucket feeding and controlled rationing
- **Mixes**: good for palatability and higher-energy feeding, but check starch carefully

For many competition horses, the most effective approach is a fibre-rich nut or cube paired with quality forage. For some, a mix is useful during harder training blocks. The right answer depends on the horse's workload, temperament, and digestive tolerance.

Is fully formulated horse feed the ideal answer?

Complete horse feed can be a highly practical option, especially when you want simplicity and a completely prepared ration in one product. A properly formulated complete feed aims to provide a **balanced ration**, bringing together energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals, and often adequate protein for the intended class of horse.

Complete feeds are often appropriate for horses that find it difficult to chew and utilise long-stem fibre, horses in a demanding competition schedule, or owners who want a simple feeding routine. They can also be beneficial if the horse eats too little forage than ideal, though forage should still remain at the core wherever possible.

That said, not every horse needs a complete feed. Some do well on a forage-led plan with a balancer, while others benefit from a targeted bucket feed plus ample forage. The best choice depends on how much the horse eats, how hard it works, and whether the current diet already covers **vitamins and minerals**.

A complete feed may be appropriate if:

- the horse is in regular competition work
- you need a straightforward, consistent feeding system
- the horse needs a balanced **balanced diet**
- forage intake alone is not adequate to maintain condition

If the horse already has good **forage** intake from **hay** or **haylage**, a balancer plus forage may be enough. That can offer a more controlled way to manage calories while still meeting micronutrient needs. The decision should be based on the horse's body condition, work, and digestive response rather than on convenience alone.

Horse feeding guidelines that every competition rider should know

Strong **horse feeding rules** support competition horses fit, reliable, and ready to perform. These principles are part of the practical **10 rules of feeding horses** that many experienced riders apply.

- Offer plenty of forage first, ideally before concentrates.
- Make sure to keep meal sizes sensible and limit large bucket feeds.
- Adjust the ration to the horse's actual **workload**.
- Do not change feed too quickly.
- Maintain feeding times as consistent as possible to support **routine**.
- Use feeds that support **gut health** and **digestive health**.
- Monitor **condition score** regularly.
- Provide clean water at all times.
- Use **electrolytes** when appropriate for sweat loss and travel.
- Reassess the ration whenever training intensity changes.

Regularity is especially important for competition horses because stress, transport, and changing environments can affect eating behaviour and digestion. A predictable **routine** helps maintain digestive stability and helps to spot problems early.

Another important point is starch management. A very high **starch level** may provide excess energy for some horses, but it can also increase the risk of digestive upset if the ration is poorly balanced. Many competition horses do better on a diet that is mainly forage-led with controlled concentrates.

Effective feeding management is not about pushing maximum feed. It is about creating consistent performance and protecting long-term soundness, appetite, and comfort.

How to use a horse feeding chart along with calculator

A **horse feeding chart** plus **horse feed calculator uk** can help owners estimate a sensible starting ration, but they remain only guides. The final diet should always be adjusted to the individual horse's **bodyweight**, **workload**, body condition, and how well the horse is holding or losing weight.

Start by estimating the horse's current bodyweight and checking the **body condition score**. Then consider how much work the horse is doing each week. Light work, moderate work, and hard competition work all place different demands on energy intake and nutrient balance.

A practical calculator will typically help you figure out:

- daily forage needs
- quantity of concentrate or complete feed
- extra requirements for conditioning or recovery
- when to reassess the ration based on training changes

The most useful **horse feeding chart** is one that starts with forage intake and then adds concentrates only if needed. It should encourage you to think about total daily dry matter and not just the bucket feed. For many competition horses, the biggest part of the diet should still come from forage, even when performance demands are high.

Keep in mind that calculators are not a replacement for observation. A horse that looks flat, drops condition, or becomes too fresh may need a ration change, even if the numbers look correct on paper. Likewise, a horse gaining too much weight may need less concentrate and more controlled forage management.

How much horse feed does a performance horse get?

There is no single answer to the amount of **horse feed** a sport horse should receive each day, because the right amount depends on forage intake, **condition score**, **exercise intensity**, and the horse's metabolism. The aim is to provide enough fuel for training and competition without overloading the digestive system.

In general, forage should remain the cornerstone of the ration. A horse with good **forage intake** from **hay** or **haylage** may need only a limited amount of concentrate feed, especially if the horse is maintaining condition nicely. If the horse is dropping weight or having trouble recovering, the concentrate portion may need to go up, or the feed may need to be more concentrated.

Competition horses in higher **exercise intensity** often need additional energy concentration, more protein support, and careful attention to electrolytes and hydration. Yet too much feed can be detrimental. Overfeeding can contribute to spookiness, poor digestion, and erratic results.

A good starting point is to assess:

- whether the horse is in correct **condition score**
- how much forage is being eaten daily
- if the current ration supports the present **exercise intensity**
- whether the horse is maintaining muscle, weight, and top-line

If the horse is lean, you may need increased **nutrient density** from a appropriate performance feed or complete ration. If the horse is prone to weight gain, you may need to lower calories while keeping the vitamin and mineral balance sound.

What is horse feed cost and how do you work out the cost?

Horse feed cost differs greatly depending on the kind of feed, the ingredient quality, the amount fed, and the degree of support the horse needs. So when owners ask **how much does horse feed cost**, the best answer is to look beyond the bag price and work out the daily or monthly feed budget.

A lower-cost feed is not always the better value. A more nutrient-dense product may cost more per bag but less per day if the **feed rate** is lower. A feed that helps maintain condition, appetite, and digestive comfort can also reduce the risk of waste and feeding-related problems.

When building a **feed budget**, consider:

- roughage costs from **hay** and **haylage**
- hard feed or complete feed costs
- extra products such as balancers or **electrolytes**
- feed increases or reductions during competition season

Different **horse feed companies** offer different feeding philosophies, ingredient profiles, and price structures. Some focus on fibre-led conditioning, while others emphasise higher-energy competition formulas. The best value is the ration that keeps the horse healthy and performing well without unnecessary extras.

Brand and product comparisons: what to look for

When comparing products from **horse feed companies**, including well-known names such as **spillers horse feed**, focus on what is inside the bag rather than the label style. Brand reputation can be useful, but the ingredients and formulation should drive the decision.

Compare products based on:

- **ingredients** and ingredient quality
- **starch** and fibre balance
- **protein** level and quality
- support for **competition performance**
- palatability and ease of feeding
- whether the feed fits the horse's current **workload**

For many competition horses, the best product is one that supports calm, usable energy and stable digestion rather than just a high calorie count. A feed with better **digestibility** and a sensible **starch level** may outperform a more intense ration that is harder to maintain.

Also think about [Find out more](#) how a product fits the rest of the ration. If forage quality is excellent, you may only need a balancer and a modest concentrate. When forage is less nutrient-rich, the bucket feed may need to do more of the heavy lifting. Whichever applies, choose a product that supports the horse's individual requirements, not just one promoted for "performance" in general.

Horse feed advice for beginners and changing diets safely

Good **horse feed advice uk** for beginners starts with one basic rule: make changes slowly. Horses with established routines can be sensitive to sudden diet shifts, and even a feed that looks better on paper can cause issues if introduced too quickly.

For those new to managing a competition horse, start with a simple system. Check the horse's existing diet, review the forage supply, and understand the current **feed ration** before changing anything. A stable feeding plan is often better than a complicated one.

Whenever you switch products, use a **gradual transition**. This allows the digestive system to adapt and helps reduce the risk of digestive disturbance or **colic**. A sensible transition period is especially important when moving between different fibre levels, starch levels, or feed formats.

Helpful beginner advice includes:

- spread changes across several days rather than overnight
- watch appetite, droppings, energy, and demeanour
- maintain consistent water intake and turnout where possible
- avoid changing multiple parts of the ration at once

If you are unsure, seek **horse feed advice uk** from a professional rather than guessing. A calm, planned approach is safer and usually more effective.

Should you make a horse feed mix recipe yourself?

A homemade **horse feed mix recipe** can work, but only if it is carefully balanced. Many owners are tempted to combine **oats**, **barley**, and other straights, then add a **balancer**. This can be suitable in the right hands, but it is easy to get the nutrient profile wrong.

Oats are a long-established energy source and are often tasty, but they are not automatically the ideal choice for every horse. **Barley** can supply more substantial energy but usually needs thoughtful handling and balancing due to its starch content. If either is used poorly, the ration may become too hot, too starchy, or insufficient in vitamins and minerals.

A successful homemade mix should still fit within a balanced feeding plan. It must consider forage quality, energy needs, protein supply, and micronutrient cover. A balancer can help cover shortfalls, but it is not a magic fix for an unbalanced recipe.

Think carefully before creating your own mix if the horse is:

- hard to keep in condition
- inclined to excitability
- in hard work
- sensitive in the gut

For many owners, a commercial feed is simpler and more secure than building a mix from straight ingredients. If you do use a homemade approach, the ration should be reviewed regularly to ensure it still supports the horse's current training and competition demands.

Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

Use this **what should i feed my horse quiz** as a quick decision guide.

- **Workload:** Is the horse in light, moderate, or intense work?
- **Condition:** Is the horse too lean, just right, or carrying excess weight?
- **Temperament:** Is the horse relaxed, sharp, or difficult to keep calm?
- **Forage base:** Is there plenty of good-quality **forage** already in the diet?
- **Performance need:** Does the horse need more condition, more stamina, or more recovery support?

If the horse is lean, in hard work, and needs calm energy, a fibre-rich performance feed or complete feed may be a good starting point. If the horse holds weight easily and only does moderate work, a balancer and forage may be enough. If the horse is sharp, avoid overloading the ration with excessive **starch** and focus on **slow-release energy**.

This simple quiz is not a substitute for a complete ration review, but it is a practical first step in pairing feed to the horse's real needs.

Common mistakes to avoid with competition horse feeding

Many feeding problems come from overlooking basic **horse feeding rules**. The biggest mistake is **overfeeding**, especially when owners try to add more bucket feed instead of adjusting the overall ration structure. More feed is not always improved performance.

Other common problems include:

- selecting a feed with too much **starch** for the horse's temperament
- forgetting that **electrolytes** matter after sweat loss and travel
- altering the ration too quickly
- forgetting to monitor **condition score**
- letting forage quality drop without adjusting the diet

Competition horses also need sensible management around travel, training, and rest days. A horse that is underfed may shed muscle and stamina, while a horse that is overfed may become flat, unsettled, or prone to digestive issues. Balance is the goal.

How feeding changes before, during and after competition

Pre-competition feeding should focus on familiarity and **hydration**. Avoid dramatic diet changes just before an event. Keep forage consistent and use the usual bucket feed unless you have a specific, tested reason to adjust it. Many horses do best with the normal ration, well-timed timing, and appropriate **electrolytes** if they are likely to sweat heavily.

During competition, the focus is on maintaining energy, water intake, and gut comfort. Small, familiar feeds are generally better than large meals. After work, the horse needs rehydration, recovery support, and a return to normal intake as soon as practical. Maintaining **electrolyte balance** is important when sweat losses are high.

Steadiness matters throughout. A horse that eats reliably before and after work is more likely to stay settled, recover well, and perform consistently.

When to ask for qualified horse feed advice

Seek **horse feed advice uk** through a qualified **nutritionist** or a vet when the horse is losing condition, putting on too much weight, displaying digestive symptoms, finding performance hard, or getting harder to handle on the current ration. Expert **veterinary advice** is especially important if you suspect **colic**, repeated digestive problems, poor appetite, or any health issue affecting feeding.

Professional support is also useful when you need help creating a feeding plan for a high-level competition horse, changing forage sources, or tweaking the ration for seasonal changes in training. A nutritionist can help you understand ingredients, match the ration to workload, and make sure the diet supports both performance and long-term health.

FAQ

What horse feed is best for competition horses?

The best **horse feed** for competition horses is usually one that supports steady **energy**, good **digestibility**, and a balanced diet built around forage. For many horses, that means a fibre-based feed, a sensible concentrate, or a well-formulated **complete horse feed** matched to the horse's **workload** and condition.

Should competition horses be fed complete horse feed or a mix?

Either option can work. A **complete horse feed** is practical and can help provide a **balanced ration**. A mix may suit horses that need more tailoring, but it must be managed carefully for starch, fibre, and nutrient balance. The right choice depends on the horse's forage intake, workload, and digestive tolerance.

How much horse feed does a competition horse need each day?

It depends on forage intake, **condition score**, and **exercise intensity**. Some horses need only a little of concentrate, while others need a more concentrated ration. Forage should remain the foundation, with bucket feed adjusted to maintain the right body condition and support performance.

What are the top horse feeding rules to follow?

The main **horse feeding rules** are to give forage first, keep meals reasonable, switch diets gradually, keep a consistent **routine**, support **gut health**, and monitor the horse's condition regularly. They make up the core of the **10 rules of feeding horses** that help support health and performance.

How do I choose between multiple horse feed companies and products?

Assess **horse feed companies** by looking at **ingredients**, starch and fibre balance, protein quality, palatability, and how well the product supports **competition performance**. A name such as **spillers horse feed** may be well known, but the best product is the one that matches your horse's individual needs and current ration.