

## About Blanketing and Horse Clothing

*Many types of horse clothing are available today. This article will help you decide whether to blanket your horse in winter, which types of coverings are most appropriate for your horse, and how some of the specialty articles of clothing are most appropriately used.*

If your horse has excellent protection from winter's biting wind, sleet and snow, and you rarely ride him in winter, then he may not need to be blanketed. He'll acclimate to cold weather as the season approaches through the development of a thick, fluffy coat and extra grease in his skin as protection against the elements. All you may need is a mid-weight turnout blanket to put on your horse in the coldest or wettest weather.

However, any horse that is turned out in winter without shelter, or that meets any of the following factors, will benefit from being blanketed:

- He's ridden in indoor arenas.
- He's fully or partially body clipped
- He's geriatric or compromised by certain health issues.
- He's unable to grow a thick hair coat
- He's been transplanted from a warm geographic area to a cool one.

If you choose to blanket your horse for extra warmth and protection, you'll have to monitor the fluctuating winter temperatures and change his blanketing to prevent him from

sweating when temperatures rise or shivering when temperatures drop. It is very important to prevent sweating under a blanket, as it can cause a chill or lead to illness. For this reason, most people who choose to blanket horses have several articles of horse clothing that offer varying levels of warmth on hand to use in various conditions. Once you begin to put a blanket on your horse, you'll need to keep him in some type of covering until warm weather arrives to avoid causing him illness or discomfort.

Some equestrians find layering to be the most practical approach to blanketing. Ready-made layering systems are available on the market, such as Rider's International Blanket Layering System, or you can create your own layering options with pieces of horse clothing that can perform multiple functions, such as a fleece dress sheet that can act as both a blanket liner and a cooler.

Horse clothing falls into two main categories: those used for turnout and those used in the stable, while trucking or under supervision. Read on to learn more about types of blankets.



### Budget-Friendly Tip: Layering

Key layering pieces that can perform double duty and stretch your horse clothing dollar include:

- A waterproof turnout sheet for use alone or in combination with another item for warmth.
- A medium weight stable blanket that can be worn in the stall or under the turnout sheet.
- A fleece dress sheet that can act as both a cooler or a liner under the sheet or the blanket.

### Neck Covers, Under Layers and Liners

Additional articles of horse clothing are intended to supplement blanketing when needed.

Neck covers are available in turnout and stable styles. A neck cover connects to the neck opening of some blankets (as well as some sheets and fly sheets) either permanently or with detachable systems featuring metal loops and tabs or hook and loop closures. Often, a neck cover is an add-on feature for a blanket, and is not generally required for every horse. The decision to use a neck cover should be made on a case-by-case basis and with individual care as over-heating can occur. Neck covers are often used on horses in frigid climates that are full body clipped, or for horses that are compromised in some way.

Under layers are designed to prevent blanket rubs and resulting hair loss that occurs from rubs. Because they are body-fitting and stretchable, under layers can be worn beneath turnout or stable blankets. Models are available in Lycra, nylon/spandex, or fleece material in a variety of patterns and colors. Some cover just a horse's shoulders, others the entire neck, and some the entire body. They are not a source of warmth.

Blanket liners can be an affordable way to turn a blanket into a heavier weight. Fashioned similarly to a stable blanket, they can be made of fleece or a combination of fabrics with poly fill and a quilted, nylon outer layer that glides easily under the outer blanket. Liners usually have short hems, falling barely below a horse's barrel, so that they do not interfere with proper fastening of the outer blanket.

# About Blanketing and Horse Clothing

## Types of Turnouts

Any article of horse clothing that is designed for turnout will be waterproof and made of a durable, rugged fabric to stand up to horseplay. It will be styled to allow freedom of motion and may have special features, such as gussets and shoulder darts, to enhance the flexibility of design. Shoulder darts and gussets on blankets provide more room in the shoulder area and can be helpful for outfitting broad-shouldered horses.

The interior fabric may be a slippery nylon to glide over a horse's coat, a netted fabric to help with breathability or a fabric blend. Waterproofing is an important aspect of turnouts for those times when your horse is exposed to wet conditions—it is unhealthy for a horse to wear a wet blanket. (Over the years of use and laundering, you should check your turnouts to be sure they maintain water repellency. Waterproofing can be replaced by professional horse blanket cleaning services or with products available for home use such as Nikwax Synthetic Rug Proof.)

### Turnout Sheets

Turnout sheets, sometimes called “lightweights” by certain manufacturers, are the lightest weight turnout available. You could compare this type of covering to a lightweight raincoat or waterproof windbreaker that you might choose to wear yourself. They often have a poly/cotton mesh lining. Turnout sheets are designed for horses to wear for protection from wet weather or mud during cool temperatures. They are usually too warm for horses to wear during hot, summertime temperatures, but they don't provide warmth in cold temperatures.

Weigh the benefits of using a turnout sheet for a particular horse. Turnout sheets, as can any sheet without the benefit of fill, make a horse's hair lie down flat, thus preventing the horse's natural ability to keep itself warm by circulating body heat through fluffed up hair. Turnout sheets should not be confused with rain sheets, which are intended for use while a horse is being supervised.



Turnout Blanket

### Turnout Blankets

Turnout blankets are available in a range of weights, where the weight refers to the amount of poly fill between the outer and inner layers. The fill adds warmth and insulates the horse's body heat. It is measured in gram weights; the higher the number of grams, the warmer and heavier the blanket. You could compare is type of clothing to winter jackets and down-filled parkas that offer varying levels of insulation.

Horses differ in their needs, making it difficult to prescribe a blanket until you get to know your horse. Some horses, like people, naturally run warm. Other horses do not develop thick hair coats and may suffer from the cold. You'll have to observe your horse to determine the appropriate level of warmth he or she requires throughout your varying winter weather conditions.

If you're new to blanketing or plan on purchasing only one turnout blanket, choose a medium or mid-weight blanket. Heavyweight blankets can become too warm in certain conditions—like a sunny day—and lightweight blankets might not provide enough warmth, especially for a horse that has been clipped.

- Lightweight turnouts from some manufacturers have 100 grams of fill in the center; other manufacturers refer to their turnout sheets as lightweights. Many people rely on lightweight turnouts with 100 grams of fill for months when the weather is just starting to cool in autumn or warm up in spring. They offer some level of warmth that turnout sheets without fill cannot provide. Some people with horses that run hot rely on lightweights with 100 grams of fill because heavier blankets are too warm for their horses.
- Mid-weight or medium weight turnout blankets have 180 to 200 grams of fill. Many horses do well with a medium or mid-weight blanket.
- Heavy weight turnouts blankets typically have 300 to 440 grams of fill. They may be critical for use on a fully clipped horse and for extreme cold weather conditions. However, the warmth they provide may be too much for some horses in some conditions.

### Horse Clothing Storage Bags

Zippered plastic storage bags come in several sizes to keep your blankets and sheets clean, neat and compact in the off-season.



# About Blanketing and Horse Clothing

## Types of Stable Wear

A variety of functional horse clothing is designed for use in and around the stable when the horse is being supervised, rather than for the rigors of turnout.

### Stable Blankets

Stable blankets are usually quilted and come in a wide range of weights from 100 to 400 grams of fill. They're usually not waterproof, but many are water repellent or moisture-resistant to guard against urine or manure stains. The use of a stable blanket allows you to replace a horse's heavier wet outerwear with a loftier item that will keep him warm while he's stabled and has restricted movement. The cut of a stable blanket is more fitted than the cut of a turnout blanket, as shown in this photo.



*Stable Blanket*

### Stable Sheets

Stable sheets are a fitted garment intended only to help keep the horse clean and dust free. They can be made from an array of lightweight fabrics, from cotton to nylon to polypropylene, which is somewhat moisture-resistant.

### Dress Sheets

Dress sheets are traditional, attractive horse clothing staples. They are typically made of wool, though some are available in fleece, and come in a variety of colors and plaids. They're the perfect item for keeping a horse comfortable during cool weather trucking. Dress sheets usually have minimal fastenings, such as a single chest buckle, a single belly surcingle and a tail cord. Many people have dress sheets monogrammed.



*Dress Sheet*



*Fitted Cooler*

### Coolers

Coolers help to wick moisture away from the horse and can provide more protection from drafts than anti-sweat sheets can. They're made of either traditional wool or synthetic fleece. Coolers are similar to anti-sweat sheets in that they are placed on sweaty or freshly bathed horses to keep chill away as the horse dries.

They are available in a variety of styles and colors. The original American cooler style is a large rectangular piece of wool with colored bindings, and coordinating brow and tail straps. The cooler drapes over the horse entirely, from jaw line to tail. This type of cooler can still be found today, even in synthetic fabric blends, along with more fitted styles. Some fitted coolers are cut like a stable sheet, leaving the neck exposed, and others fit up the neck to the jaw line and secure with hook and loop fastenings.

You'll know when to remove the cooler when you see a dew-like coating has formed along the top surface of the cooler. Sometimes, a very wet or sweaty horse may require two changes of coolers during the drying process.



*American Cooler*

### Irish Knit Anti-Sweat Sheets

Irish Knit Anti-Sweat Sheets are made of cotton or cotton blend mesh. They are placed on a sweaty or freshly bathed horse to keep chill away while the horse's coat dries. The holes in the mesh allow hot air

from the horse's body to escape, while the mesh itself protects the horse from drafts. Anti-sweat sheets should be monitored during use as the fibers can become saturated if a horse is extremely wet. Once this happens, the sheet should be replaced with another anti-sweat sheet or a cooler if the horse isn't dry. In very cold temperatures, you may want to layer a cooler on top of an anti-sweat sheet. This type of sheet usually has minimal fastenings, such as a single chest buckle, a single belly surcingle and a tail cord.



*Anti-Sweat Sheet*

### Rain Sheets

These sheets are designed to keep both your horse and tack dry if you need to walk him from one location to another during inclement weather. Rain sheets are not intended for turnout as the minimal fastenings are ties that close the sheet to keep out wind and weather.



*Rain Sheet*

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- [About Body Clipping](#)
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