

Cold Weather Barn Management Tips

Frigid temperatures and winter storms inevitably bring challenges to daily barn chores and your efforts to maintain healthy horses. But if you take the time to prepare while temperatures are still warm, you'll be well equipped for an easier winter. Here is a checklist of cold weather barn management tips compiled from Dover Saddlery's own experienced equestrians. We hope you find them helpful!

Prepare for Water & Electricity Challenges

- Check the functionality of barn hydrants. Leaky hydrants can freeze easily or break entirely, leaving your barn without water in the worst of weather.
- Repair or replace leaky hoses or hose fittings. While small leaks can be a messy nuisance during summer, they can become a hazard in winter as patches of ice form on the barn floor or near critical walkways.
- Install foam insulation around water pipes. This covering is economical and can be found at your local hardware store.
- Install heat tape on hydrants, while paying attention to the product's installation instructions.
- Make sure you know how to turn off your water source in the event of a frozen or burst pipe.
- Many horses do not like to drink very cold water. Because water intake is just as important to a horse in freezing weather as it is in hot weather, purchase heated water buckets. Water will be maintained at a cool and appealing temperature, but above freezing to enable and encourage your horses to drink. Heated water buckets, available in 20 quart and 16 gallon sizes, will save you from the difficult task of having to break ice and remove it from your horse's buckets every day.
- If you purchase a submersible heater, be sure it is intended for livestock drinking water tubs. Some submersible water heaters are intended only to heat bath water and will bring water to boiling.
- Consider obtaining a heated hose or a heated hose cover. These items will save you from the hassle of draining your barn hose or worse, coping with a frozen hose.
- If you use stock tanks to water horses, or if you store water in them as a water source, consider a Cleanflow Stock Tank Filter to keep water cleaner. It filters 200 gallons of water per hour, and can be equipped with a deicer to prevent the tank from freezing.
- For people who have well pumps, loss of electricity leads to loss of water. Consider purchasing a generator with the capacity to run your well pump. You should also purchase an ample supply of water storage containers for the number of horses in your barn.
- Obtain at least one battery-operated lantern for use during a power outage. Some of these lanterns project enough light to illuminate an entire stall or grain room.
- Be sure to follow closely manufacturers' instructions for electrical devices used around livestock.

When Snow & Ice Arrive

All your planning and preparation will have made this time easier. Hopefully, you'll enjoy winter as a time to hack your horse in snow or take photos of him playing in drifts.

We suggest that you monitor local weather conditions closely for impending storms. When rough weather conditions are forecasted, fill your water containers and top off water buckets. Watch for storms that can affect hay, grain and shavings deliveries and stock up beforehand.

Many horses are naturally reluctant to drink in cool weather, but your heated water sources will help encourage water consumption. Provide salt blocks just as you do in summer, and consider adding electrolytes to your horses' diets.

On mild days, open barn windows to help with the exchange of stale and fresh air. Each day, leave your barn doors open at the ends of aisles. A stabled horse is better off with a blanket than to be closed in entirely with dusty or stale air that can contribute to breathing issues.



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Here are some additional suggestions for preparing for winter.

Prepare Your Facility and Order Supplies

- Consider installing indoor and/or outdoor thermometers if you don't have them already. Being able to monitor the temperatures inside and outside is helpful as you regulate the blanketing needs of the horses in your care.
- Plan how to best handle the storage challenges resulting from blanketing. Install hooks or racks for drying damp horse clothing and blanket bars to make clothing changes timely and convenient.
- Remove cobwebs, especially those near light fixtures. In winter, electric lights are used more often and for longer periods of time than in summer. Cobwebs act just like fabric—they'll easily catch fire from a spark or extreme heat.
- Medications and topical wound care solutions—even shampoos and fly sprays—can freeze or lose efficacy in frigid temperatures. Relocate these solutions into a temperature-controlled area where they'll be ready to use when needed.
- Check the functionality of gates, latches and exterior barn door hardware. Ice can make a weak or damaged piece of hardware break easily.
- Remember that horses can withstand colder temperatures than humans, though drafts aimed at their bodies can be unhealthy. Check that stall boards are not allowing cold air to be directed at a horse's barrel.
- Tighten electric fencing, and check its hardware and connections. Horses searching for grass to nibble on may be more likely to test fences during winter months.
- Locate your snow shovels in an easily accessible area. Tune up your snow thrower and tractor if you have this machinery. Remember to contract with a professional snow plower if you need one.
- Fill tires for wheelbarrows to allow you maximum steering control over treacherous winter footing.
- Set up supplies of sand (with scoops for spreading) near barn and pasture walk ways to give your feet and the horses' hooves some grip in icy conditions.
- Consider purchasing a pitchfork with metal tines. Stronger against ice than most plastic varieties, it will come in handy for picking up frozen manure from turnout areas.
- Order a supply of hay and shavings to carry you through your stormy season. Add a horse vacuum to your wish list if you don't already have access to one.
- Vacuuming makes grooming easier in cold weather by removing hair, dust and dried mud that sticks to your horse during winter thaws and in the spring mud season.

Ventilation

Ventilation is a key issue in maintaining a healthy environment for stabled horses. Good barn design takes proper ventilation into account. It ensures that warm, stale barn air is pulled up and out the top while fresh air is pulled in at ground level. But many barns have been built without thought for ventilation.

Whether your barn fits into this category or not, consider these checkpoints:

- If you've removed the glass from your barn windows in the spring, it is time to put them back up. However, don't seal barn windows with plastic as you might seal house windows to conserve heat. Both horses and humans working in the barn will benefit from the ability to open windows on the mildest of winter days.
- Thoroughly clean debris from hay and shavings storage areas to rid them of dust, rodent droppings and nests that can contribute to stale air and unhealthy breathing conditions. This targeted cleaning also reduces the amount of brittle and flammable material buildup in your barn.
- Consider obtaining a product to reduce unhealthy barn odors. Several are available on the market, including some that can help you stretch your bedding budget by absorbing moisture. Odor-No-More is a proprietary blend for odor and moisture control that you sprinkle in your stalls to help absorb urine. Bye Bye Odor is a natural microbial solution formulated to eliminate urine and manure odors. Stable Fresh is an all natural liquid formula containing bacteria that speeds the bio-degradation process while eliminating odors.

