



EQUINE

GETTING THE BEST OUT OF YOUR PADDOCKS

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QUALITY

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EXPERIENCE

MANAGING YOUR PADDOCK



Correctly managing your paddocks can make a big difference to the amount of grazing available for your horses and help it to withstand the pressure of horses.

Horse's paddocks often have to provide diet for 365 days a year, provide an area for resting and playing, and often an area for exercise.

Quality grassland is essential for year-round grazing because good quality grazing pasture is the healthiest and most natural diet for horses and has the potential for areas to be closed off for hay/haylage production to provide winter feed (which has been very expensive to buy the last few winters).

Managing grass for horses is totally different to managing for agricultural animals. Paddocks tend to be small and are often intensively grazed by nothing other than horses and most owners like, or need, to be able to use paddocks all year round. Horses also require very different nutritive supply compared to productive cattle and sheep.

Alongside low productivity, poorly managed fields can be the source of many internal parasites and poisonous plants. Similarly, soil ingestion from mole hills or large bare patches can cause colic.

Poorly managed paddocks will look shabby, be wet and waterlogged and subject to increased poaching and become unsuitable for riding or even in extremes, turnout.

A well-kept paddock can provide the most natural and healthy environment for work, rest and play for our equine companions!

BASIC PADDOCK MAINTENANCE

Daily Duty

Looking at the condition of your paddock should be a daily task and can easily be completed while you do other tasks such as lifting droppings, checking fencing, and water troughs.

Throughout your paddock, look for any signs of bare spots that may be starting to develop, whilst keeping an eye out for new/young weeds that may be coming through.

After it rains, check to see if anywhere is sitting in water for longer than expected and keep an eye out for any unnatural wet spots developing which may be from burst drains or water pipes to troughs.

If there are ditches around the fields then clearing these when necessary will make a big difference to the drainage of the field.

The tools

Before you call in a contractor or invest in serious machinery, remember there are a number of hand tools you can use to undertake some of the smaller maintenance tasks.



- A metal shavings fork can be used in place of a rake for 'harrowing' patches
- A straw/manure fork can be used in small areas to break down through compacted soils
- A soil corer makes soil sampling easier but a spade and trowel are an alternative

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO PADDock MAINTENANCE

STEP 1

WALK THE PADDock

Easily done as a daily duty when poo-picking or checking horses, fences or water troughs.

Use this time to look for bare patches, wet areas, damage by pests or moles and weeds.

How do I know if I need to renovate?

- Identify any problems in the field
- Understand what species you want in your paddock, then, if you have between 30-50% undesirable species, the best action is to remove these weeds and replace with the correct species by overseeding
- If you have over 50% weed grasses, you are more likely to need to plough the ground and start again as it is beyond repair



STEP 2

CHECK SOIL STRUCTURE AND FERTILITY



- Take a spade and dig a few holes to examine the top 10-15 cm (4-6 inches).
- It should break up easily and have lots of roots growing throughout the profile and plenty of worms
- Soil sample. A basic soil sample is inexpensive and will help you understand the levels of nutrients in your soil. Sample every 4-5 years on heavy soils and 2-3 years on light soils.

Targets: pH 6-6.5. Phosphorus (P) Index 2. Potassium (K) Index 2



The Basics

- Picking up droppings, rotating grazing where possible and not grazing grass right down to the ground
- Mixed grazing with cattle or sheep can also reduce worm burdens and control excess growth

STEP 3

Learn to identify weeds and weed grasses especially poisonous ones like Ragwort and Buttercup. Perennial weeds like Ragwort, thistles, nettles and docks should either be dug out or sprayed.



DEAL WITH WEEDS

STEP 4

IMPROVING THE PADDock

You need to renovate the paddock when you have 30-50% undesirable species in the field.

Overseeding

Overseeding is the most successful and economical way to improve horse paddocks that have open swards and damaged areas. Overseeding can be done either by manual broadcasting or with help of a spreader. Overseeding is a simple, effective and low-cost way to improve worn leys or old paddocks without ploughing and re-seeding.

Re-Seeding

The re-seeding of a paddock is only recommended if the damage is severe. Reseeding takes time and there must be adequate alternative grazing/turnout for at least 12 weeks.

When

Soil temperature needs to be above 8 °C, so this usually means between April and September.

How

Harrow vigorously to remove dead material and shallow rooted weeds and weed grasses. This can be done with a garden rake in small areas.



Sow

Seed into fine, firm seedbed which has adequate moisture levels

Roll

Essential to ensure seed makes contact with soil allowing germination.

Seed needs water and soil to germinate.

Should I add fertiliser?

If you get the soil right you stand a good chance of growing grass; all grass will benefit from feeding with fertilisers.

Do not fertilise at sowing because the new plants have no roots and unable to take up nutrients.

All you do is favour the existing sward and provide more competition to the new plants.

The final tip

Ultimately, on-going management is important; a little bit of attention now and again will really pay dividends.

We should be looking at our grass and paddocks almost as often as we look at our horses.

The more you look after your grass the more it will look after you.

SEASONAL MAINTENANCE GUIDE

SPRING

- From March onwards, harrow to remove dead vegetation and to aerate the soil
- Reseed any bare patches using a equestrian grass seed mixture
- Roll the paddocks to flatten poached areas and consolidate loose soil
- Rest paddocks that will be used for growing hay
- Take action against weeds and poisonous plants. If the infestation is heavy, seek expert advice as specific herbicide may need to be applied
- Remember - only take machinery on to ground that is dry enough to prevent further damage and compaction

SUMMER

- Late spring/early summer – continue weed control, including immediate removal of any poisonous plants
- Top the grass to remove long, stalky grass and rough areas. Do not top ragwort or foxglove as these become more palatable to horses when dried but retain their toxicity
- If conditions were too wet in the spring, harrowing and rolling can be undertaken if required
- Hay crop can be cut and baled

AUTUMN

- Maintain existing drainage by keeping ditches clear of plants and debris
- Continue to control any ragwort growth
- Water trough pipes should be checked and insulated ready for the winter
- Where possible, keep horses away from falling acorns and sycamore seed
- Plant any new hedges/trees; ensuring species are safe for horse paddocks

WINTER

- In poached areas, such as gateways, grass matting (ideal to lay during the spring), wood chip or gravel can help minimise damage
- Where spare fields are available, rotate the paddocks or designate a field specifically for winter turnout. Ideally use the paddock with the best drainage, which is unlikely to flood and where possible has two access points to prevent the same areas becoming badly poached
- Conduct soil analysis in February to identify any nutrients that are lacking. Seek expert advice regarding any liming or fertiliser application that may be needed in early spring.

PRODUCT RANGE

GENERAL PURPOSE GRASS SEED



10kg
SOWS: Up to 0.7 acre
REPAIRS: 1 acre

TRADITIONAL MEADOW GRASS SEED



10kg
SOWS: Up to 0.7 acre
REPAIRS: 1 acre

HERBS MIXTURE SEED

1kg

In naturally occurring grassland many more species are found other than grasses.

While these are low yielding plants, they have the ability to supply different trace elements and minerals to grazing horses or ponies.

This blend of herbs contains many of the plants found in older horse pastures, which can give valuable properties to the diet.

- The herb mixture has been developed especially for horses and ponies - it includes a number of deep rooting and nutritious species which provide a good source of minerals and trace elements
- It will add diversity of species to the pasture
- Perennial mixture of species

IN THE BAG

70%	Perennial ryegrass
16%	Strong creeping red fescue
8%	Meadow fescue
6%	Timothy
10kg packs.	

25%	Tall fescue
25%	Strong creeping red fescue
20%	Meadow fescue
15%	Timothy
15%	Smooth-stalked meadowgrass
10kg packs.	

IN THE BAG

45%	Chicory
20%	Sheeps Parsley
20%	Salad Burnet
9%	Ribgrass
6%	Yarrow



Grass experts since 1904

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