



Horse Pasture Management for All Seasons

JANUARY

- Keep horses off pastures when ground is soft and wet to avoid mud, trampling of pasture grasses, and soil compaction.
- Confine horses in heavy use areas located near barn during inclement weather.
- Remove manure from sacrifice lot/heavy use area daily.
- Check drinking water daily making sure to break ice to allow horse access to water.
- Calculate stocking rate or how many horses your land will support for the grazing season keeping in mind that 1.5 acres or more of pasture per horse is most ideal for maintaining a healthy, productive pasture.
- Lime fields in accordance with soil test recommendations when footing permits.
- Reassess your hay needs for the remainder of winter and order more if needed.
- Always keep a 2-3 week hay supply on hand in case heavy snows prevent new hay delivery.
- Visit the Horse Outreach Workgroup booth at the Maryland Horse World Expo in Timonium, MD to get your questions answered by conservation and forage experts.

FEBRUARY

- Continue to feed horses hay in sacrifice lot/heavy use area if pastures are soft and wet.
- Broadcast seed ladino-type white clover in bare spots in pastures (~ 1 lb/acre) in order to maintain ~ 25% clover content during the grazing season.
- Check drinking water daily making sure to break ice to allow horse access to water.
- Update Nutrient Management Plan if required by law, including preparing and sending in the Annual Implementation Report (AIR).
- Check fences and fencing supplies, and don't forget that you can reserve a post hole digger from a local soil conservation district or equipment dealer if new fencing is required.
- Register for upcoming pasture-related educational events hosted by University of Maryland Extension and local soil conservation districts.

MARCH

- Allow horses to graze when pastures begin to show new growth (i.e. "green-up") and are a height of 6 inches or more.
- Acclimate horses to lush spring pastures by allowing them access to pastures for an hour or two during the first few days and then gradually increase their turnout to full-time over the next 7 days.
- Apply composted manure or 1/3 of the annual fertilizer amount to pastures that aren't currently being grazed making sure to follow soil test recommendations or your farm's nutrient management plan.
- Move horses from pastures that are grazed less than 4 inches in height to rested pastures that is at least 6 inches in height.
- Drag or harrow pastures to break up manure piles after recent grazing by horses that have been moved to another pasture for grazing.

- Check water pipes, gutters, and drain lines for defects and repair.
- Contact your local soil conservation district for technical assistance with water management issues on your farm.

APRIL

- Continue to manage horses by moving them from a pasture grazed to 4 inches to a pasture that is 6 inches in height or more.
- Avoid being locked into a pasture sequence if grass height of pasture indicates a different order of rotation.
- Move horses onto the sacrifice lot/heavy use area and feed hay if pastures are too wet for grazing.
- Inspect pastures at least weekly to monitor forage growth, weed encroachment, and to inspect fencing and grazing horses.
- Control existing weeds with herbicide and frequent mowing to ~ 4 inches.
- Contact your local University of Maryland Extension Office to receive help with weed identification and recommendations for their control.
- Evaluate grass cover in sacrifice lot/heavy use area to begin plans for reseeding of overgrazed and/or bare areas in late-summer/early fall.
- Check for new growth of white clover seeded back in February.

MAY

- Mow recently grazed pastures to no lower than 4 inches to maintain vegetative growth and to control weeds before they go to seed.
- Apply another 1/3 of the recommended annual fertilizer application to pastures.
- Delay grazing fertilized or limed pasture until after about 0.25 inch of rainfall has fallen.
- Evaluate soil erosion in sacrifice lot/heavy use area and other heavy use areas (gates, feeders, run-in sheds, waterer's).
- Contact your local soil conservation district for assistance with soil erosion control measures.

JUNE

- Reserve or rest one or more pasture fields starting in early to mid-June so that it can be used for late summer grazing (i.e. summer stockpile).
- Adjust grazing system to manage for slower seasonal pasture growth by providing longer recovery times for pastures between grazing.
- Continue to mow recently grazed pastures to no lower than 4 inches to maintain vegetative growth and to control weeds before they go to seed.
- Cut thistles after 'strawberry moon' or the June full moon.
- Allow horses to graze any pasture fields rested since March.
- Identify summer weeds and initiate control method with the help of your local University of Maryland Extension Office.
- Submit soil samples to a certified soil testing laboratory every 3 years to receive annual lime and fertilizer recommendations.

JULY

- Close off and rest all pastures while feeding hay to horses in sacrifice lot/heavy use area if drought conditions exist.
- Irrigate pastures if possible.
- Continue to manage grazing horses by moving them from a pasture grazed to 4 inches to a pasture rested to 6 inches height or more.
- Evaluate pastures to identify those that have less than 50% desirable grasses so that they can be scheduled for reseeding in the fall.
- Pre-order certified seed to ensure seed availability and an August delivery date if a late summer reseeding of pastures is planned.
- Establish contracts with agricultural service providers that can apply lime and/or fertilizer if recommended by soil test.

AUGUST

- Plant certified pasture seed optimal for grazing horses and soil conditions of grazing pastures between August 10 and September 10. Early planting is critical to provide adequate fall growth to ensure robust spring stands. Do not graze reseeded pasture for a minimum of 6 months.
- Begin resting tall fescue pastures for winter grazing.
- Close off pastures and feed hay to horses housed in sacrifice lot/heavy use area if drought conditions and slow grass growth exist.
- Put your soil erosion correction plans to work to make sure all projects are completed before the fall rainy season.

SEPTEMBER

- Do not allow horses to graze pasture grasses below 4 inches in height because food reserves and growing points are in lower stems of grasses.
- Work on suppression of fall weeds with either routine mowing, biological control (goats and sheep), or herbicides.
- Plan for winter liming based on soil test recommendations.
- Apply remaining 1/3 of annual compost or fertilizer amount to pastures.
- Plan to broadcast seed in February if percentage of white clover in pastures is less than 25%.
- Place order for hay to cover fall and winter needs.

OCTOBER

- Apply lime to pasture according to soil test or nutrient management plan recommendations.
- Continue the suppression of perennial weeds using mowing or herbicides in early October making sure that herbicides are the type that move in the plant with accumulating sugars (translocatable herbicides) to active growing points.
- Remove excess left over vegetation being careful to not allow thick windrows of mowed vegetation or patches of thick dead vegetation since the windrows or patches will shade the underlying grass killing it and leaving an open area for weeds to encroach.

NOVEMBER

- Discuss grazing and conservation cost-share programs with soil conservation district staff to see whether financial assistance is available.
- Pre-order certified seed to take advantage of dealer discounts, seed availability, and a February delivery if spring spot seeding of pastures is needed.

- Begin turning horses out on tall fescue fields set aside for winter grazing (i.e. stockpiled) once orchardgrass and other pastures have been utilized.
- Allow horses to closely graze pastures that will be frost seeded with clover in the spring down to 4 inches to remove excess residues to allow for better establishment.

DECEMBER

- Perform maintenance on all pasture management equipment.
- Check water daily making sure to break ice to allow horse access to water.
- Assess body weight and body condition score of horses on a monthly basis throughout winter in order to make changes to feed program if weight loss occurs.

For more information on horse manure management and other soil conservation and water quality practices, contact your local Soil Conservation District. For more information contact your local Soil Conservation District/ Natural Resources Conservation Service/(SCD/ NRCS) office or county University of Maryland Extension office. Addresses and phone numbers can be found at www.mda.state.md.us/resource_conservation/technical_assistance/index.php, www.md.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory or extension.umd.edu or check the listing County Government for SCD/MCE or US Government, Department of Agriculture for NRCS of the phone book blue pages. The Horse Outreach Workgroup was established to provide information to horse owners on pasture and manure management issues. Technical assistance is available from local county Soil Conservation Districts/Natural Resource Conservation Service and the University of Maryland Extension office. The workgroup consists of representatives from local Soil Conservation Districts, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maryland, Delaware Cooperative Extension, and the Maryland Horse Council. The Maryland Department of Agriculture's Office of Resource Conservation provides coordination for the workgroup. January 2012