



ASK THE VET

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HAYGAIN
hay steamers

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Being Prepared for Winter: How does my Horse's Nutrition Change?

Now that we have all survived the holidays and the New Year, it is time to get ourselves and our horses back in gear! Personally, I almost always make a resolution to exercise more and eat better. This is certainly because I eat WAY too much food during the holidays! With that said, we also need to remember our horses' nutrition as well. Even though this has so far been a surprisingly mild winter across the country, there is still a difference in the availability of grazing pasture.

During the spring and summer months, the grass is new and growing, and our horses gain a significant amount of their nutrition from the pasture. When winter hits, it is important to supplement our horses with enough hay to offset what they are no longer getting from the now "dormant" pasture grass. This can often be challenging, as availability of good quality hay can be diminished depending on the growing season. Even when the pasture is low, horses are still not very keen on eating dry, older hay with a high proportion of stems.

The winter months are a perfect situation for steamed hay. When hay is steamed, the plant absorbs the moisture from the steam and becomes softer and more palatable. With an increase in palatability, the horse will likely eat more hay. This is good for several reasons.

First, as mentioned above, the horse needs to offset the caloric loss from less pasture and eat more hay in the winter. Not only that, but the more hay the horse eats, the more he chews. The more the horse chews, the more saliva he will produce. Saliva is a natural buffer for the stomach. So the more the horse can produce saliva, the better protected his stomach can be from a pH imbalance, making him less prone to gastric ulceration (which is important year-round). Another advantage to steamed hay in the winter is the extra hydration the horse can gain. It is often difficult to get enough water in a horse during the winter months, and steamed hay is one more way to keep them hydrated and ward off a possible impaction colic.

It makes perfect sense to steam your horse's hay in the winter. It will help them eat as much hay as possible by increasing palatability, increasing hydration and giving them a nice warm feed during the colder months. Here are some [important tips for using your HAYGAIN hay steamer](#) in the winter to prevent freezing and maintain optimum usage to keep your horse happy and healthy! STAY WARM!

-- Stephanie Davis, DVM

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