



## Winter Management for the Outdoor Horse

*"The stable environment invariably presents challenges of dust, mould and proper ventilation,"* says Susan Raymond, instructor of Equine Guelph's Management of the Equine Environment online course. *"Most horses are well equipped for living outdoors and thrive, provided certain provisions are met."* Dr. Raymond completed her PhD in investigating the effects of exposure of horses to mycotoxins. She has also been involved in air quality research which provided practical recommendations to the horse industry on stable design and management.



The ideal environment for most horses is to live outside with herd mates 24/7. This satisfies their need for locomotion and provides their digestive system with the optimal conditions to function as nature intended.

Here are just a few tips for managing the horse's environment through the winter season:

1. **Provide a [heated water source](#).** Horses need to consume large volumes of water to keep forage traveling through the gut. [Reduce your risk of colic](#) by ensuring water sources do not freeze.
2. **Provide the best quality hay** and be cognizant that horses will need more forage in the winter to meet their energy needs for thermoregulation. Avoid round bales which can become havens for dust and mould, increasing the [risk of respiratory ailments](#).
3. **Shelter** provides a windbreak and can be natural or manmade. Location is very important. Constructed shelter considerations include, sturdy construction with rounded edges (pressure treated 4x4 or thicker), built on a slight grade (2 – 3 degrees) for moisture runoff, situated so prevailing winds blow against the walls not the entrance. Ample room should be allotted for the amount of horses (e.g. a 3 sided structure for 2-3 horses would be a minimum of 12 x 36 feet and high enough that a rearing horse would not be endangered).



4. **Maintain highly visible, safe fencing of durable construction.** Gate width is important for safe leading and the ability to bring in machinery. Gates should be made well with well-supported posts and placed in a location that will drain well. Mud management systems are also available to minimize mud in high traffic areas.



5. **Safe footing.** Keep pathways clear with a handy mix of wood chips, sand and rock salt. Stock up on supplies before the storm when these items can become scarce. In the paddock watch for unsafe footing, ice and uneven ground. It is good to have a small turn out area available in case the larger one becomes unsafe. Discuss with your farrier the options of going barefoot for the winter or putting on snow pads. Regular steel shoes do not have traction and allow snow and ice to ball up inside turning everyday moving around into an uncomfortable and hazardous venture.

6. **Daily checks.** It is recommended to give horses a daily once over in the winter including hoof picking, wound checks and checking under that blanket for weight loss or gain. If the horse is blanketed you will also want to check it hasn't slipped and is not rubbing.



**For more information sign up for Equine Guelph's 12 week online course on [Management of the Equine Environment](#).**

**Meet the instructor: [Dr. Susan Raymond](#)**