

GRACE'S GUIDE...

to keeping your Thoroughbred healthy over the winter

Autumn is a difficult time of year with horses, particularly when it comes to making decisions about their rugs – our climate can be so changeable. I hope the following principles will help you understand how it is possible to winter your thoroughbred most effectively.

RUGGING UP

- Many horse owners make the mistake of rugging their horses up too early in the year and putting on too heavy a weight rug in November. Whether you are keeping your horses out 24/7 or bringing them in at night, start with a lighter rug and get them into the heaviest ones with full necks at the coldest point of the year.

If you do intend wintering your horse out 24/7 allow him to grow a decent winter coat by not rugging up too soon. There are some fantastic rugs available now which are lightweight and warm so there is no excuse for horses being too cold in the depths of winter.

For those horses being wintered out 24/7 it is ideal to have fields with good hedge cover and/or a field shelter available.

- Check a horse's body temperature by feeling the ears and inside the top of the hind legs – if they are warm and the coat is not looking 'starey' then the horse is coping and not yet ready to rug up.

Monitor your horse closely, he will give you indicators when he is not feeling warm enough. Some horses are thinner skinned than others and age must also be a consideration. Recognising each horse's own individual needs and using common sense is the key at all times.

- Maintaining the consistency of your horse's body temperature is very important. If the horse is living out 24/7 avoid bringing him in some nights and out others. Only bring him in if it is a blizzard or torrential rain conditions. If you need to do this you MUST remove his rug altogether or exchange for a lighter one overnight. He will then feel the benefit of the heavier rug when he goes back out.

FEED AND WATER

- A thoroughbred needs feeding twice daily with both hard feed and ad lib hay or haylage in the field when wintering out. This is imperative to keep them healthy and in good bodily condition.
- Water tanks should be cleaned weekly and checked daily: break and remove ice in cold weather. Horses still need as much water in winter as in the summer.
- A horse stabled overnight needs to be fed before turning out in the morning and again when coming in at night.

These important guidelines relating to change of rug and rug weight are the same for horses out during the day only.

- Make regular checks under the rugs to ensure there are no sores. This also gives you the opportunity to brush away loose hair and scurf from the coat.

To sum up, keep your horse's body temperature consistent. Don't rug up too soon and when you do, keep the heaviest weight rug for the coldest part of the winter.

A horse's body temperature is obviously very different from our own. They have a coat – always remember they are animals and if prepared, fed and looked after correctly they can withstand the weather.

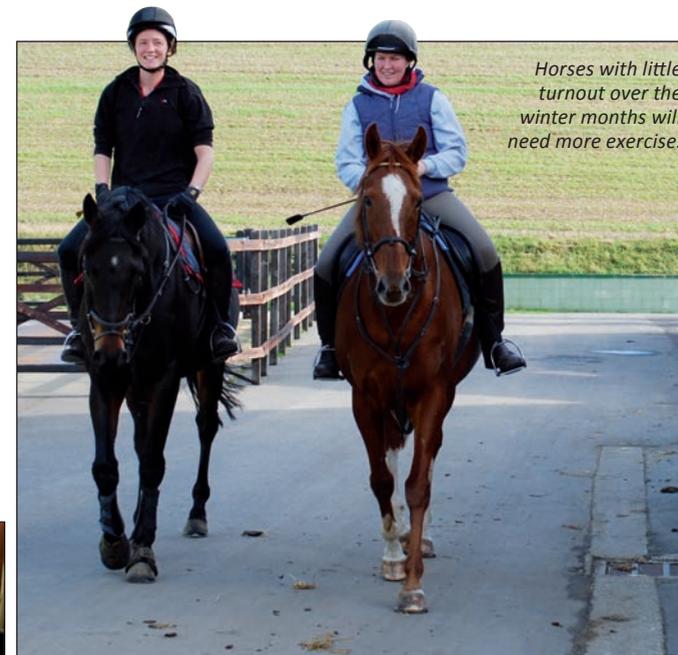
“Many horse owners make the mistake of rugging their horses up too early.”

EXERCISE IN WINTER

- Remember, horses who have little access to turnout will be fresher and will, therefore, need more exercise.
- Use your turnout areas wisely. Aim to get through the winter without churning up the fields in the first few months of bad weather. Shorter periods of turnout are perfectly acceptable and will allow the horse to have the freedom it needs to get the freshness out of him.
- If you have roughed your horse off and he will not be in work over winter start him back quietly in the spring. This will build up his fitness and muscle tone gradually.

MUD FEVER/CRACKED HEELS

- A huge problem for some horses who are particularly prone to this condition – those with white socks are usually the worst victims. Take special care to clean and dry the legs when the horse comes in from the field every night. Removal of any scabs by softening them with a warm poultice overnight is very helpful but be sure to dry the areas well with a towel afterwards.
- I only recommend doing this if horses are in at night as scabs removed in the field can often be made much worse, i.e. lymphangitis.



Horses with little turnout over the winter months will need more exercise.

Don't rug up too soon, feed and water regularly and keep your horse's body temperature consistent. Remember they are animals, if cared for they can withstand the weather.

- Mud fever cream, or powder designed for the purpose, can be applied to help clear up the scabs, although it can take some time to overcome the problem.
- Where the horse is in the field and it is not possible to bring it in we use a mixture of 50:50 calamine lotion and surgical spirit on a sponge and apply daily. This helps to dry up the area and the scabs often fall off themselves leaving the healthy skin below.
- Horses wintering out need to be checked for cuts twice daily and their feet should also be picked out daily.

In conclusion, by following these basic principles with rugging up, feeding and general care you will have a better chance of keeping your horse healthy and avoid any respiratory problems during the winter months.

*Grace Muir
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ABOUT GRACE...

Grace Muir has a life time of experience working with thoroughbreds and has been Stud Manager at her parents' North Farm Stud for the past 17 years. Her knowledge and expertise, some of which has been handed down from her father and grandfather, form the basis of the work done by HEROS. This knowledge is passed on to the Charity's staff and volunteers as well as to the people who take on HEROS horses.