

## Horse Nutrition and Herbs

For thousands of years people have been using herbs to heal themselves and animals essential to their livelihood. There are a number of advantages to be gained from utilizing these natural substances:

- Plants are highly effective in not only healing but also serve as nutritional supplements.
- Added to the diet they improve the immune system and increase the strength of other bodily systems.
- When used correctly, the side effects sometimes experienced with modern pharmaceuticals which very often weaken the body in one area while counteracting the symptoms in another, are not experienced.

The purpose of this article is to share some of the beneficial effects I have experienced first hand. My hope is that this will encourage readers to do their own research on this very valuable source for health and nutrition.

The herbs discussed here have been used on my horses on a regular basis. During times when the herbs have not been fed to them for weeks at a time, I have seen a noticeable change in the condition of the horses even though they continued to be on high quality feed. It is believed by some that depletion of the soil over decades of constant use has lessened the quality of the food grown in it. I have found it beneficial to add a concentration of nutrition from a source other than good quality feed to keep my animals at a noticeably higher level of health. The benefits are tangible, not only in their performance but in their longer useful life and the fact that they don't become ill as easily or as often.

These herbs promote healthful qualities without taxing the bodily elimination organs as some of the synthetic vitamins can do. In addition to being more readily absorbed into the body, horses find many of these plants more palatable.

The following are widely used for horse nutrition that promotes health and healing. Some herbs are not safe for pregnant mares, but none of those

are included here. There are many exceptional books that go into extensive detail on herbal remedies and nutritional advantages. These herbs can be added to the feed or made into a tea to be added to bran or beet pulp. The later produces more benefit.

### Celery (ground seeds)

- Helps as a treatment in degenerative joint disease (arthritis).
- Promotes with joint suppleness.
- Reduces acidity in the body.
- Increases circulation.
- Tends to make horses want to drink more water which helps in the removal of toxins through the urinary track.

### Comfrey

- One of the most potent healing agents.
- Can be fed internally but also used externally to heal wounds by using in a poltice or a wash. Healing can be so fast caution must be used to be sure there is no internal infection since cuts can heal shut before beneficial draining occurs in deeper wounds.

### Dandelion

- A good liver tonic and cleanser.
- Promotes good digestion.
- Contains a wealth of nutrition and a large handful is a helpful addition to feed, particularly when horses are on poor pasture.

### Kelp T

- A very economical way to provide a large number of minerals. More is not always better. I feed about a tablespoon per day to average size horses.

### Yarrow

- An excellent blood purifier.
- Has antiseptic properties. There is much to be gained in the way of healing properties with yarrow.

- Congestion can occur in any internal organ and yarrow is very effective in 'packaging up' toxins for more efficient elimination.

### **Chamomile**

- Has a calming effect on horses as well as humans.
- Very high calcium content.
- Acts as an anti-inflammatory so can be used for aches and pains.

### **Fenugreek**

- The seeds are extremely nutritious, containing A,B and C vitamins as well as vitamin E.
- Has high protein content.
- Tastes pleasant to horses, encouraging them to eat.

### **Nettle**

- Tends to dapple the horses coats.
- Is high in Iron and Vitamin C.
- Is good for blood cleansing and circulation that assist healing when horses have laminitis, toxin in the blood causing inner hoof wall to separate from outer hoof.

### **Rosehip**

- High in vitamin C, it helps every cell of the body retain elasticity.
- Contributes to lung health.
- It is also high in vitamin and minerals that promote hoof growth and reduce stress.
- Helps the body fight infection.

### **Garlic**

- An excellent aid to strengthening the immune system.
- Also is a vermicide (parasite control).
- A powerful antibiotic full of minerals which help heal internally
- An excellent source of sulfur which aids in healthy skin, hair and hooves.

### **Wormwood**

- Promotes strong digestion

- Increases appetite.
- Highly effective for killing parasites. I still use a paste wormer but much less often when my animals are getting wormwood, garlic and fenugreek on a regular basis.

Minerals are essential in assisting the body to utilize vitamins.

Calcium plays a major role in bone growth and remodeling and digestion as well as other vital functions. It is important to balance the calcium/phosphorous ratio of approximately 2 parts calcium to 1 part phosphorus. For example if you are feeding a lot of alfalfa hay, your horse will benefit from a diet with phosphorous. Some good sources are oats, bran, wheat germ, garlic and seaweed.

Salt-Free choice is important and for one of my horses that sweats a lot I still add a teaspoon of sea salt to her feed about 3 times per week. She tends to need that to stay properly hydrated in the hot summer months.

All these herbs can be purchased by mail order by the pound and they have proven to be highly effective and lower in cost than many of the supplements on the market for horses. If you search online for 'bulk herbs', you will find many vendors that sell botanical herbs by the pound.

Leafy herbs can be fed by the handful or a strong tea can be made from them and poured over beet pulp. Beet pulp is easily digestible and contains the proper ratio of calcium to phosphorous that is so vital in high performance horses. It is a good feed for helping animals to maintain their weight without the dangers of overfeeding that are associated with grains. The tea method will make your herb supply go 4 or 5 times farther though it takes a little more time. You can make enough for a few days and store it in the refrigerator if you are feeding just a few horses. I often include dandelion, nettle, and wormwood in the mix. Then add a tablespoon of powdered rosehips and garlic to the beet pulp after it has absorbed the tea. A little bran can be added to absorb the extra liquid. I like to add crimped oats at this point and put in the separate feed tubs. If you have a horse with bad teeth you can add rolled oats instead.

For horses, it is always important to make any dietary changes very gradually. The horse's system can be shocked by a sudden change. Their digestive tract has healthy bacteria that help to digest the foods the horse is regularly consuming. Gradual changes will allow the types of bacteria to change also.

I have barely scratched the surface of the information about the benefits of these herbs. I have been tremendously impressed with the results of these simple plants for maintaining exceptional health, and hope that in sharing my experience, others will explore the many herbs available and find similar results.

**The master Antara**