

# Horse Maintenance Programs

## Giving a little extra to the horses who give us their all.

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We take our time and look carefully at the horses that come into our programs. These horses have a very special role to play in the success of our clients so they need to be very special horses. Over the course of the trial period we look at a wide range of characteristics and skills in order to determine if the horse will in fact be a good match.

We evaluate:    Temperament    Soundness    Other program specific needs

Size    Training

We may also look into: The type of work load the horse is used to.

If the horse has had any time off. Why it had time off.

Does the horse have particular likes and dislikes in riding style, equipment, environment, etc...

If the horse meets all of the program criteria and holds promise as a great addition it is welcome with open arms and joins the ranks of the established lesson herd.



This is where the horse maintenance programming really begins. It is extremely important to work to ensure that the horses we work with receive the care and attention they need in order to continue to be healthy, happy, productive members of our staff.

There are a number of areas to be considered in horse maintenance and when looking at these various areas it is important to be honest with the true extent of personal knowledge. There is not a horse person out there who knows everything.

## Horse Maintenance Includes:

### Feeding Program

A key element in horse health is nutrition. Each horse has different nutritional requirements and it is important to ensure that those requirements are met. Keep in mind that feeding programs do not have to be complicated, but they do need to be tailored to the needs of your herd.



### Routine Veterinary Care

Vaccinations, health checks and assistance with health and soundness issues, even assistance with dental checks are important roles your veterinarian can play in maintaining a healthy herd.

## Routine Farrier Care

We have all heard the saying 'No hoof, no horse'. The consistent and careful attention of a qualified farrier helps to ensure that your horses have the solid feet they need. The consistency and care can often identify and address potential issues before they begin to have an adverse affect on the horses overall well being.



## Day to Day Assessments

It is important to look at the horses each and every day. The more consistent this routine the more able we are to identify changes in movement and changes in behavior early on. For example a horse that is normally happy go lucky is starting to pin ears and act unhappy; that horse is trying to tell us something. Taking that extra few minutes to look over the horses we work with helps to catch small issues before they turn into large problems.

## Routine Ground Work

Our horses work with a variety of different people in a variety of different circumstances. It is important to provide them with a measure of consistency. Routine ground work helps to keep the expectations clear for them. Through providing this type of routine interaction we can work on addressing and/or preventing vices.



## Fitness Programming

Contrary to what many in the outside world tend to think, the horses working with our clients need to be sound and they need to be strong. It is important to devise methods to ensure that our horses overall fitness is maintained. This may be through mounted activities or lunging programs.

# Getting started

In order to know what it is you need to do, it is important to be able to assess what you have. What do you see when you look at your horses?

- \* Conformation
- \* Coat condition
- \* Hoof condition
- \* Overall level of tone

These are basic elements that help to determine a horses overall fitness and well being. How much do you know? It is important to take the time to learn the basics. This allows you the opportunity to determine what 'faults' are potential red flags and what 'faults' are workable.

If you are in the learning process, use your resources! There are horse professionals all over whose expertise may be of use to you.

- \* Trainers spend their lives working with horses of all shapes and sizes. It is their job to make sure that the horse is fit to do the job for which it is being trained. It is also their job to be familiar with conformation and how it may affect the horse as it does that job.

- \* Veterinarians can help you in determining the best approach to overall health care. They can help with assessments on health and wellness as well as soundness. These individuals can help to determine if the issues you are having are issues that can be managed or issues that will continue to deteriorate.

## Develop the plan

Once the assessment is complete it is time to formulate the plan for that horse. The assessment has provided a solid look at where the horse is at. That information is used in determining what the horse will need for maintenance.

- \* Nutrition - Are there any modifications needed in the horse's current feed program? An increase or decrease in rations? Do they need any type of supplement?
- \* Exercise program - What type of work out program does the horse need? Is it a general program of maintaining the current level of tone and flexibility? Does the horse need an increase in its work out to combat issues with weight? Is it a horse that needs a specific program to address particular training or behavioral issues?

### Considerations in exercise programming:

- \* What is the horse's current work load? We want to be certain that the program is set up to help the horse perform at its fullest potential. The exercise program should be set up in such a way as to not over extend it is intended to help.
- \* What type of work out is it going to be? There are a number of ways to work with a horse. When setting up an exercise program it is helpful to have a plan for the range of options available. Does this horse's exercise program have to be done under saddle? Or are there components that can be done on the ground?
- \* The little extras - Are there other things that can be done for the horse that will help to ensure its health and well being? Stretching exercises, chiropractic visits, even taking them out for a walk to eat grass are things that can be incorporated into a maintenance program.



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## Implementation

This is where it starts to get a little bit tricky. Developing the plan and knowing what you want to do with the horses to help keep them healthy and happy is the easy part. Once the ideas are in place, the next step would be to take the ideas and implement them. For many programs this is where the issues begin to arise. Small programs, tight budgets, limited staff time. These are all issues that can have an adverse affect on a maintenance program.

As with so many other things in this industry, implementation of a maintenance program may require a little creativity. Naturally staff should be involved with the process. These individuals work with the horses on a day to day basis and participating in their care and maintenance helps to ensure that they are familiar with their movement, training and behavior. But staff time is often limited making it difficult to ensure that every horse gets the necessary attention.

Taking into consideration these limitations on staff time we need to tap into our creativity and resourcefulness. We need to use our resources. Who can help us to ensure that our horses get all the attention that they need?

- \* Volunteers - Our volunteers come to us with a wide variety of skills. They come to our programs because they believe in what we do. Many of them would be more than happy to add a little extra time to their commitment in order to help out the horses.
- \* Local Pony Club groups - These groups have kids in a wide variety of ages, encompassing a wide range of riding abilities. There may be individuals in these groups with not only the skills you need, but the time and interest to help out.
- \* Local 4H groups - The 4H program also has a wide variety of kids with a wide range of abilities working in a wide range of disciplines. As with the Pony Club groups there may be kids in these programs with the time and talent to help out.
- \* College Equestrian Teams - Many colleges and universities have equestrian teams. These teams may be hunt seat, stock seat or dressage. As many of these riders do not have access to horses of their own, they are willing to take on other projects in order to maintain their skills.
- \* Local Lesson Barns - Many riders taking lessons at riding facilities do not have horses of their own. As with many of these other riders these individuals are often very eager to have the opportunity to expand their riding time.



## Match the rider with the horse

As people express interest in your horse maintenance program it is important to have a screening process in place.

- \* A written account of riding background is helpful. This provides insight into what type of riding the individual has done, length of time with horses, training, etc..
- \* It may also be beneficial to have in writing what type of time commitment the interested individual is able to make.
- \* A mounted test. Many people who have been around horses, fancy that they know more than they actually do. When determining if a potential rider is going to be appropriate it is helpful to have them ride for you. This allows you a first hand look at their skills.

With the information provided in their written information and the information you gather through their riding test you can determine a couple of things.

- \* The person does or does not have the skills necessary to help you help your horses.
- \* What horse(s) that person would be best suited to assist with.



Once the individual has been deemed appropriate and has been paired up with a horse, it is important to maintain follow through. Keep track of the riding they do and that the work they do with the horse(s) does match up with what you have set up in their work out protocol.



## Follow Up

Continue to monitor the horses and riders in your program. This allows you to know that the horses are getting the consistency that they need and that they are getting the work that they need. Taking the time to re-evaluate the exercise protocol for the horses helps to ensure that changes are made as needed.

## Is there a place for everyone?

Not everyone who is interested in helping with maintaining your horses will have the riding skills necessary to participate in the mounted elements of your program. That does not mean that there is not a place for them to contribute. Look around for other aspects of horse care in which they can participate that will still be beneficial to the horses in your program.

- \* Stretching - There are a number of stretching activities that are very beneficial for our horses.

Volunteers or interested individuals can be taught some of the basic stretches.

Incorporating this type of activity broadens the spectrum of potential

participants which broadens the spectrum of 'little extras' we can offer to our horses.

- \* Grooming - Most horses enjoy the grooming process. For many it is a nice opportunity to

relax. People interested in helping may be more than willing to come and

give the horses a thorough grooming. This extra attention helps ensure that the horses are clean, relaxed and ready for whatever comes next.

- \* Walker - Many programs have those horses who are easy keepers. In

order to maintain a healthy weight these horses may have dietary

restrictions. In some instances it is a nice treat for these individuals

to have a little quality time in the grass. In order to make sure that

they don't over do it this treat time is supervised by a walker.

-Walkers are also a big help in cases where a horse is coming back

from an injury. They may need someone to take them out for a little

light exercise to help the healing process along.

There are many things that can be done to help our horses. Some of it is part of

our day to day routine, some of it comes under the idea of 'extra'. We need to

find a way to ensure that we are doing all that we can to ensure that they are

happy and healthy so that they can give their all to our students. It takes a little

extra time and it takes a little extra effort but it is important to remember that it is

time and effort well spent. Our horses are worth it.

