

## **This Old Horse Partner Information & Best Practices Guide**

This Old Horse partners with qualified foster providers who open their hearts and their barns to horses who need short-term and long-term foster care.

Horses needing foster placement are usually in good health and body condition and have made their way to our program through a hardship circumstance. Many of them are older, unable to be ridden, but suitable as pasture companions.

Specialized foster care is also needed for horses in our recovery program. Severely underweight or horses on restrictions due to lameness have individualized care and recovery plans that are managed by the foster provider.

Through our partners, we can continue to admit new horses and use our skills and expertise to help horses in crisis. If for any reason, the foster partner cannot or does not wish to continue to support a horse, we will accept that horse back into our regular program.

The benefits of becoming a This Old Horse Partner:

- Save a horse from hardship. There are so many horses in our area that are in crisis due to the inability of their owner to properly care for them. Join our community of compassion. If you can help one, we can help one more.
- Make a charitable contribution. The cost of feed, hay and supplies needed to care for your foster horse may be tax deductible. This Old Horse is a 501c3, nonprofit organization. Some of the costs of caring for a horse in our program are a charitable contribution to us. Our federal tax ID number is 45-4234611.
- Benefit from our experience and resources. This Old Horse is community is filled with horse and horse keeping experts from farriers to tack fitters. We have a broad base of knowledgeable people who are happy to share their skills and answer questions any time.

### **Foster vs. Adoption.**

Because many horses admitted into our program have experienced hardship or crisis, we are committed to maintaining a relationship with them throughout their life. By placing them with foster partners, we can keep in touch and continue to support and monitor the horse and the provider.

This Old Horse would retain ownership of the horse so that if circumstances change and you could not continue to support the horse, it would return to us. Horses in our program cannot be bred, raced, gamed, transferred, subleased or sold.

### **Are you a good match?**

The best placement for horses has the following characteristics.

- Horse-safe fencing. The best fencing for horses is electric fence that is always on. The object of safe fencing is to keep horses off of the fence. Wooden posts with high tensile-coated wire are extremely safe. Electric wires on T-posts are acceptable if vinyl safety caps protect the T-posts. Wooden or vinyl plank fencing in good repair is also acceptable.
- Access to clean water all year. Horses need access to clean, fresh open water in all seasons. Well-maintained automatic waterers or stock tanks (heated in winter) are acceptable. Horses do not eat snow for hydration. Typically, a horse will drink 5-10 gallons of fresh water a day. Stalled horses watered in buckets will need sufficient sized buckets refilled as needed to meet their water intake needs.
- Forage. Forage is the foundation of horse nutrition. Horses need about 2% of their body weight in forage every day. An average sized (1,000 lb.) horse will consume about 20 pounds of hay a day. A typical small square bale of hay averages 40 lbs., thus a horse will need a half bale of hay per day to meet forage requirements. Large round or square bales can vary in size from 600 to 1000 lbs. Forage calculations are based on the weight of the bale and the weight of the horse. Horses who graze in grass pastures during the summer will need 1.75 to 2 acres per horse to meet their forage needs. Most mature horses working on maintaining their weight benefit from grass hay. Alfalfa hay is richer forage than grass hay and more suited for performance horses.

Some horses cannot tolerate unlimited access to grass pastures because of a metabolic condition that can cause laminitis or founder. Ponies and miniature horses and donkeys are particularly vulnerable to founder and may need to be restricted to a dry lot with hay as their only source of forage.

Horses should be introduced to spring pasture gradually, after the grass is 8 inches high or longer. They should be rotated off pastures when the grass is eaten down to 4 inches to maintain the health of the pasture. Unlike cattle or goats, horses are selective grazers and will avoid weeds and grass that are unpalatable to them. That is why horse pastures are typically a combination of low grass and high weeds. Horses will not move onto eating the weeds once the desirable grass has been eaten. They will continue to eat the grass down to the dirt if they aren't moved off the pasture to let it grow back.

- Shelter: Horses need access to covered shelter during severe weather. Three sided run-in shelters, loafing sheds or stalls are all acceptable shelter options. Shelters should be free of protruding objects such as loose boards or nails, debris or machinery. Horses are curious and tenacious and will make every effort to explore their surroundings and dismantle objects of interest!
- Haltering during turnout. We discourage the use of halters when horses are in turnout or stalled. Horses are not super problem solvers. When they get something stuck or hung up, they will pull until something gives. Nylon halters do not give unless they are

specifically designed with a breakaway feature. Leather crowns will also break away under pressure.

### **Best practices in horse keeping**

**Feed.** Our nutrition philosophy emphasizes a forage first diet. If the horse has access to good quality forage that is the cornerstone of a good diet. We typically supplement the forage diet with a pelleted diet balancer typically fed at a rate of 2-3 lbs. per day. The diet balancer serves as a vitamin, mineral and omega 3 source that helps balance any missing nutrients in the hay.

We do not recommend sweet feed or senior feed unless the horse has a specific nutrition plan that requires a more specific intervention. We offer free choice loose mineral and loose salt. Horses have smooth tongues and end up biting mineral and salt blocks. Loose salt and mineral are an easier way for horses to consume them. Horses will take up salt and mineral at their discretion when they crave it. Loose salt and mineral should be kept out of the weather.

Feed should be stored in an area where horses cannot access it and stored in vermin proof containers or rooms.

**Deworming:** We give all horses an oral dose of ivermectin after the first hard frost in the Fall. Other deworming protocols are determined based on fecal egg counts done periodically by our vet. Some vets recommend rotational deworming protocols or daily deworming.

**Vaccines.** Each Spring, we do annual 5-way vaccine against Eastern and Western strains of Equine Encephalomyelitis (Sleeping Sickness); the infectious respiratory disease Equine Influenza caused; and both strains of Rhinopneumonitis (EHV and EHV-4). This vaccine also protects against Tetanus.

**Coggins tests** are required when horses are moved from one location to another.

**Farrier.** Most horses will function well with a regular hoof care done by a good farrier. Unless there are significant hoof or lameness issues, hoof trims are done every six weeks. In winter, horses who have access to a snowy turnout can go 8 weeks between trims because the snow will provide some friction. Sand cracks on hooves are common on horses during the summer when hard ground and fly stomping creates small cracks on the hoof wall.

Some horses and some horse breeds have more fragile or brittle hooves and may benefit from a shorter trim cycle or shoes. The goal for the farrier is to create a good, balanced weight bearing hoof.

**Blanketing:** A horse's winter hair coat will start developing when the days get shorter. Horses who are allowed to grow a natural winter hair coat and winter fat pad are wonderfully suited to handle cold weather. A natural winter hair coat lofts to insulate the horse based on weather conditions and blanketing a horse impedes their natural defenses.

Horses have no soft tissue below the knee and can stand in snow without discomfort. Their long nose helps warm cold air for breathing. Horses who have free choice access to hay in the winter use their amazing hindgut digestive process to create an internal furnace that keeps them comfortable. Windy or wet (rain or snow) conditions in winter reduce the insulating effect of their hair coat and they will need shelter under wet and windy conditions.

Horses that do not develop a sufficient hair coat or who are underweight will need supplemental blanketing. Blankets should be removed at least daily to check for rub marks and damage. Blankets that extend over the tail can catch manure on the tail and skin irritation if the area is not regularly cleaned.

Blanket sizes are based on the number of inches measured in a straight line down the horse's side between the mid chest and the center of the tail.

We use summer flysheets and fly boots on horses that have reactive skin to fly bites or underweight horses that expend too many calories swishing and stomping at flies. Flies are attracted to wet areas like the eyes of a horse. We use fly masks during daytime hours.

**Companionship.** Horses are herd animals and need to be with other horses. This helps them feel safe and comfortable. Besides the socialization, horses engage in mutual grooming/itching those spots that they just can't reach and swishing flies from one another when they are head to tail. Since horses are vulnerable when lying down, their herd mate stands sentinel to alert their buddy of any potential danger.

Horses establish a very specific pecking order in the herd. When a new horse joins a herd, you can expect some sniffing, biting, squealing and kicking while the pecking order establishes itself. This is normal and expected. We typically do not accept or place stallions in foster care. Rescued stallions are gelded prior to be accepted.

When a starved horse is placed, we place them in a contained space (stall or small paddock) where they have visual and auditory contact with other horses, but the space is their own.

We give them free choice grass hay so they can expect that there is enough food for them and no one (or no horse) is going to take it away from them. The second phase is to put them with a companion horse so they can expect that even if they share their food, there is enough to go around. Then we integrate them into a herd with their companion. This way, they have a friend in the herd and can expect that there will be enough to eat no matter how many are sharing.

**Bedding.** Bedding is a matter of preference for the barn owner. We use pelleted bedding that functions in the same way as kitty litter. It is designed to soak up urine. It is an efficient way to keep stalls free of manure and urine with minimal waste. For horses that are extremely bony and weak, we use wood shavings and deeply bed the stall to create more of a cushion for them when lying down.

**Weight.** All new horses are weighed using a weight tape upon admission. For underweight horses, we weight tape weekly. All other horses are weight taped monthly. We do body condition scores on newly admitted horses and assess body condition scores quarterly for all our horses. The goal is to reach the ideal weight and body condition for each horse and to maintain it.

**Dental.** Rescued or neglected horses typically have poorly maintained teeth. As part of our initial work on admission, we have the veterinarian do a power float on each horse. This is done under sedation and dental checks and floating are done every 1-2 years thereafter for all horses.

**Sheath cleaning.** Geldings tend to build up dirt and oil on their sheath and small hard 'beans' in their urethra that require periodic cleaning and removal of the beans. Some horses tolerate this, and some require sedation for the procedure. Most veterinarians will do it during the dental float while the horse is already sedated.