

# “Hay”, You! Be Proactive & Plan Now For Hay & Forage Replacement Needs

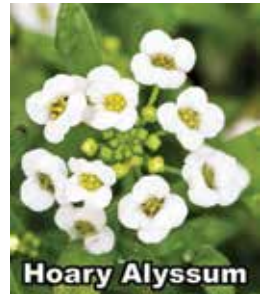
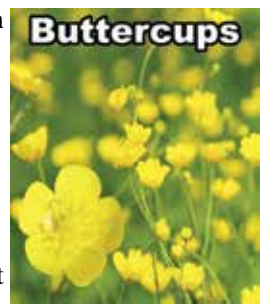
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Historically, late summer is prime time for drought conditions in many parts of North America which unfortunately has proven true this year in the Shenandoah Valley and surrounding areas. When pastures turn brown and crispy, it’s time to inspect your fields for toxic weeds such as hoary alyssum and buttercup which can flourish in drought-stricken fields and overgrazed pastures. Then, when the cool nights begin and leaves start to fall, take note of dropped leaves such as red maple and oak, which are also toxic. Most horses will avoid toxic weeds and dropped leaves under normal conditions, but when there is little else to eat, they might sample them with ill effect. If your pasture is infested, remove your horses from it and consider using an herbicide on the fields to eradicate the problem weeds, rake up fallen leaves, and then start using another fiber source to supplement the poor grazing. Feeding hay, beet pulp, roughage cubes, hay pellets, or another digestible fiber alternative can help horses maintain their weight during the dry season and through the fall and winter.

Be prepared that hay, the number one choice for pasture supplementation, may be more difficult to find this fall and winter due to the lower than average rainfalls seen this past spring and summer. Start gathering as soon as you can and choose the highest quality hay you can afford. Quality hay is more digestible and will save you money in the long run.

Here are some tips to maximize your hay supply and your horse’s health when it comes to hay consumption:

- Clean and check hay feeders and replace them if necessary
- Ground or low trough feeders work well to keep dust out of horses’ respiratory systems, but consider installing rubber mats around your hay feeders so they can be swept and hosed off regularly allowing horses to eat fallen hay without ingesting dirt or sand
- Use round bale feeders or hay nets (slow feeders are great) to minimize waste and allow for around the clock availability to mimic natural grazing tendencies
- If you have just one hay feeder, throw a few flakes around the field to allow horses lower in the pecking order to get their fair share and avoid fights to eat
- Remember, horses should eat 1.5%-2.5% of their body weight in forage daily so if your hay supply is inadequate, supplement with chopped bagged hay, hay cubes, hay pellets, beet pulp or other highly digestible fiber sources – no peanut or rice hulls!
- In the example of a 1,000 lb healthy horse, approximately 183 small square bales (at approximately 50 lb each) and 10 round bales (at approximately 900 lb each) will be needed each year per horse
- Hay needs will be impacted by body weight, activity level, health status, and total diet
- Make sure you allow for at least 10% extra in your hay supply to account for waste, trucking delays, a rare bad bale, etc.
- Even the highest quality alfalfa or lush green pastures cannot supply horses with all of their vitamin and mineral needs so be sure you provide all horses, especially easy keepers, with equine mineral blocks, not just red “trace mineral” blocks which are more than 90% salt with just a “trace” of minerals designed for all species, not specifically for horses



## Important safety reminders:

- While you may have less than pretty pastures now, as days grow shorter and temperatures fluctuate, fructans can remerge so if you have an insulin-resistant horse or one prone to laminitis, don’t put away those grazing muzzles yet!
- Changes from pasture to hay may affect some horses digestively so be sure to keep your eyes open for signs of discomfort that may indicate compaction colic.
- Periodically inspect your hay for signs of mold or heat, particularly if you suspect it might have been rained on or given inadequate time to cure. Bales that feel or smell warm should never be stored anywhere near a barn, and regular checks with a thermometer (slipped down between bales in your stack) are an excellent safety precaution. Any hay that registers 140°F or more should be removed from the barn slowly, as even throwing or moving the hay quickly could be enough to cause it to burst into flames.



In welcoming the cool, crisp fall weather, horse owners will adjust their routines and feeding protocols accordingly to adapt to climate and activity levels. With hay shortages on the horizon, take advantage of free advice on feeding programs available to you through your local independent feed stores and account managers from feed manufacturers. Most of these folks are “horse people” too who truly want what’s best for your horses and are readily available by phone, email, or farm visits.

“Hay”, we hope you’ve gained some good tips from this article and wish you and your horses a healthy and happy fall season!

