

## BEDDING FOR HORSES

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Materials for bedding of stalls for all classes of livestock are becoming increasingly difficult to procure and the cost of these materials has increased dramatically over the past few years. Most items used for bedding are by-products of various industries. The economic status and increased technology have resulted in many materials that have traditionally been used as bedding being used by or within the industry producing them.

When studying potential bedding materials, there are several factors to consider other than cost, availability and transportation. These factors include absorbency, dustiness, possible allergic reactions, consequences of materials being eaten, handling equipment, storage facilities, how quickly or well the materials decompose and flammability.

There are several types of bedding available to the horseowner depending on geographic location. All bedding materials have advantages and disadvantages.

Straw - Good straw bedding comes from the stems of oats, wheat, rye or barley. Your location will be a great factor determining availability. oat straw is the most common and most water absorbable, but is becoming more scarce and not readily available in some areas. Wheat straw is the next most desirable. Straw commonly comes in bales that may vary in weight from 40 to 60 pounds, is clean and fresh looking, and relatively free of foreign materials such as dust, weeds and grass. Cut or chopped straw will absorb about 25% more water than long straw, but may produce some dust. Some horses will eat straw even though it has almost no nutritional value.

Wood Products - Sawdust and wood shavings are used by many horseowners. Fine sawdust should not be used because of dust and possible respiratory problems. Wood shavings or chips look good, are easy to handle and, if the stall is "picked" daily, it will keep the horse and stall clean. Shavings or chips from soft wood are about twice as absorptive as hard wood. Wood products may have a tendency to dry the horse's hooves, possibly needing moisture added to the hoof walls, coronary bands and frogs two to three times weekly. Wood shavings and sawdust may have a tendency to stick to newborn foals and the mare's reproductive tract during foaling. Sawmill by-products may not be desirable because of hardwoods, dust and possible walnut particles that could cause laminitis (founder). Wood products decompose slowly and may increase soil acidity.

Paper Products - Shredded paper is a relatively new bedding material finding limited use in the horse barn. The quality of the product depends upon the quality of the paper. Results show that the average amount of water absorbed by shredded paper is greater than straw or wood shavings. Bedding stalls with paper requires less material than using either straw or wood shavings. The paper bedding is dustless, clean and horse generally do not eat it.

Corn Plant - Crushed or ground corn cobs can be used as a good bedding for horses. Corn stover (stalks) need to be shredded or chopped for the best absorbency. Horses may be tempted to eat the stalks which have very little feed value. Ground or crushed corn cobs have a better appearance than the shredded or chopped stalks. Depending on availability, cost and handling, these may be good possibilities.

Horseowners may reduce bedding needs and costs by:

1. Chopped straw, waste hay, fodder or cobs will go further and do a better job of keeping horses dry and clean than long materials.
2. Daily picking of the stalls will extend the usefulness of bedding.
3. Ventilate stalls to lower the humidity and aid in keeping bedding dry.

4. Where possible and practical, provide exercise outside of the stalls.

It is our responsibility as horseowners to also be concerned about the environment and how our horse interests may be effecting it. Being aware of optional choices in bedding is good stable management. The future will possibly see more nontraditional materials being used for bedding. It will be up to the individual user to determine what is available in the area, to evaluate sources and supplies available, and to determine cost effectiveness.

#### WATER ABSORPTION OF BEDDING MATERIALS

Material	Pounds of water absorbed
Per 100 lbs. of dry bedding	
Barley straw	210
Corncoobs (crushed or ground)	210
Corn stover (shredded)	250
Cottonseed hulls	250
Hay (mature, chopped)	300
Leaves (broadleaf)	200
Oat hulls	200
Oat straw (long)	280
(chopped)	375
Peanut hulls	250
Rye straw	210
Sawdust (top quality pine)	250
(run-of-the-mill hardwood)	150
Tree bark (dry, fine)	250
Wheat straw (long)	220
(chopped)	295
Wood chips (top quality pine)	300
(run-of-the-mill hardwood)	150
Wood shavings (top quality pine)	300
(run-of-the-mill hardwood)	150