

## Run-In Sheds Provide Shelter for Pastured Horses

Healthy horses are not bothered by most weather or temperature variations, and they can usually be kept outside in a wide range of climates. **In extreme conditions, however, pastured horses should have access to some type of shelter.**

Natural landforms and vegetation may offer some respite from inclement weather. A pasture that has **tree lines, hedgerows, creek valleys, or hills** can provide a measure of relief from sun, rain, and wind.

Man-made shelters range from elementary (a single-sided vertical windbreak) to more involved (an enclosed stall with access to an exercise paddock). A good compromise is the run-in shed. **A typical run-in shed is a three-walled structure that is open on one long side.** The shed offers protection from the elements while allowing horses to move in and out as they please. Even when the weather is not severe, horses will spend time in the run-in shed to escape sun, rain, and biting insects. Such use has given rise to the structure's alternate name of "loafing shed."

Construction options include having the shed designed and built, doing your own design and construction, or purchasing a run-in kit (look for ads in horse magazines). Regardless of your choice, you can **avoid mistakes by looking at existing run-ins in your area and talking to local horse owners about good and bad features of sheds on their properties.** This is especially helpful if you have recently purchased land and are unfamiliar with weather patterns in the region. Before you build a run-in shed, **give some thought to the following considerations.**

**Use.** Besides its primary use as a shelter, the run-in can be a **feeding and watering station.** It may have a stall or loft to **store hay.** It might be the back half of a divided **structure that houses farm equipment** on the other side. Whatever its use, **let the safety of your horses direct the design and materials.** Look at all aspects of construction with an eye to preventing situations in which a horse could be trapped, injured, or allowed access to stored feed or machinery.

**Location.** The construction site should be **sloped or graded to allow drainage** away from the structure. If the shed will be on a flat area, build up the site with clay or gravel before construction starts. Avoid low spots or areas where water collects after a rain. **Place the open side away from prevailing winds.** While sheds may adjoin a barn or fence line, building the shelter in an open area of the field ensures that there will always be at least one side that is shady and out of the wind. Situate the shed at some distance from the house to minimize problems with flies or odor. Place the shed closer to existing buildings if you want to **run water or electric lines** to it or if you will need to carry hay or grain to the shelter. If possible, **situate the shed so you can easily see the interior** from outside the field.

**Design. Size depends on the climate as well as the number and temperament of the horses** that will be using the shed. While **150 square feet per horse** is a general rule, you will need more space if your herd contains especially dominant or timid horses. For only a few horses or for those that tend to get along well, somewhat less space can be considered. Standard **depths are from 12 to 24**

**feet** (colder climates call for deeper sheds), and common **lengths are 24 to 48 feet**. If this size will not accommodate all the horses in a field, it may be more practical to **put up a second shed** than to build one very large shelter. If you plan to use the run-in for feeding hay or grain, allow plenty of space so that all horses can have access to feed racks or buckets. Keep in mind that it is **difficult to monitor intake by an individual horse** if feeding is done this way.

**Materials.** The typical run-in shed is made of **treated support posts, a frame of 2 x 4 lumber, and a sloping metal roof** that allows at least 10 feet of head space. Walls can be made of a variety of materials. Safety is the primary consideration.

- **Metal siding** is affordable, strong, easily cleaned, and not subject to rot or mold. A run-in shed with metal walls must be **lined with thick boards or plywood** to a height of four or five feet to ensure that a horse cannot be injured by kicking through the wall.
- **Wood sides** are strong and safe. Boards must be thick enough to resist breaking if they are kicked. Horses tend to chew boards, and wooden sheds will need more maintenance than metal buildings. Wood that touches the ground will eventually rot.
- **PVC panels** are more expensive than other types of siding, but they last longer, do not need wood lining, and **may be the most economical** choice over the life of the shed. PVC is safe, easy to clean, and requires less maintenance than other materials.

**Ventilation.** How can one building provide a shady, breezy loafing area in the summer and a snug, non-drafty shelter in the winter? Situating the shed to block prevailing winds should take care of winter needs. **To catch breezes in hot weather, consider adding windows or removable panels** high on the back wall. The roof overhang needs to be long enough to keep out blowing rain. Another way to provide summer shade and take advantage of moving air is to **extend the roof at the front of the shed, providing a non-walled area where horses can get out of the sun.**

**Footing.** For a few horses in a dry climate, it may be possible to build the run-in shed without any special surface preparation. Where there is more precipitation or if a larger number of horses use the shed, the ground in and around the shelter will become muddy from rain and urine. To avoid this situation you can put down **six inches of gravel covered by crushed rock or dirt, or pave the floor area with rubber blocks, blacktop, or rough-finished concrete.** The run-in can be bedded with straw or wood shavings to provide comfortable footing and protect both the surface and the horses. Manure and dirty bedding must be removed on a regular basis.

**Maintenance.** Even with the sturdiest initial construction, **horses will eventually damage any building** by chewing, rubbing, and pawing all surfaces and edges. **Check frequently for loose boards, protruding bolts or nails, exposed metal edges, and other hazards.**