

Doing the Dishes

Much consideration is given to what to feed horses. Rations are tweaked to ensure that horses receive all of the proper nutrients in just the right amounts. Can you imagine going through the exacting process of formulating an ideal ration for your horse only to see it poured into a sticky, filthy feed tub? Similarly, can you conceive of investing in automatic waterers only to have them overflowing with algae by midsummer?

While it's impossible for horses to fuss about the **cleanliness of bins, troughs, tubs, and buckets** (and horses are most concerned with just *getting* fed), **spick-and-span feed and water containers are a hallmark of a well-managed stable**. Yes, the water pails and feed buckets will look better, but there's a far better reason for all of this scrubbing—a healthier environment for your horse!

Stabled Horses

If confined to the barn for much of the day, a horse is likely to have several buckets or containers hanging in its stall. These buckets are often hung from screw eyes with double-end snaps or specially made bucket hangers. Snaps and hooks allow buckets to be removed from the wall quickly when a thorough scrubbing is necessary.

Periodic cleaning of all buckets and feed tubs is recommended. Frequency of cleaning depends largely on what is being fed. Pelleted concentrates fed straight from the bag, for instance, make little mess. Straight oats are also a “clean” feed. Dust and the occasional hull may be the only residue left from these meals. On the other hand, sweet feeds are usually laden with molasses, particularly during spring and summer, and often a sticky grime accumulates on the interior and rims of feed tubs. If your charge also receives a dollop of corn oil or other liquid supplements, the feed bin could become unbearably grungy in short order. **In hot weather, when flies and other insects are patrolling stables, feed tubs may be cleaned once or twice weekly.** Scrubbing them in winter months may take a backseat to other chores such as tossing hay to pasture-kept horses. However, dipping temperatures should not preclude periodic cleansing.

Unlike feed buckets, **water buckets should be given a quick scrub and rinse every day** before refilling. Many people use hoses to fill water buckets, particularly when there are several horses to serve, but this method may keep buckets from being cleaned as often as necessary. Buckets belonging to some horses, such as those notorious for dunking their hay, should be cleaned daily with all water-soaked forage discarded. Other horses manage to contaminate their buckets with fecal material. If this occurs, buckets should be scoured with detergent on every occurrence. **If these buckets are unattended to, horses will in time find the water unpalatable, thus discouraging consumption.** If forced to drink the water, horses may reinfest themselves with parasites.

Be particularly careful when cleaning water buckets in **freezing temperatures**. Water may splash out of the bucket and into the crevices of double-end snaps, which will make the snap impossible to open the following day if temperatures should dip below freezing. Therefore, it's best to keep the snaps attached to the stall wall and remove only the buckets.

Few tools are needed to clean buckets meticulously: **an all-purpose detergent (such as a mild dish-washing detergent, *not* dishwasher detergent, or laundry detergent such as Tide), a stiff-bristled scrub brush, and plenty of water.** If the buckets are cleaned regularly, detergents will not have to be used on every occasion. Once buckets have been washed with detergent, they should be **rinsed over and over with drinkable water until all suds have dissipated.**

In instances when disinfection is required, bleach can be used after scrubbing with a suitable detergent. By adhering to the dilution instructions on the bleach bottle or jug, a suitable **disinfectant solution** can be mixed. The solution should be swirled in the bucket and left to sit for 10 or 12 minutes. The solution can then be dumped and the bucket can be **flushed with potable water**. Another product that may come in handy in times when disinfection is required is Nolvasan, a bactericide and viricide that purportedly kills the pathogens responsible for many contagious equine diseases such as influenza, rhinopneumonitis, and some strains of encephalomyelitis.

Pastured Horses

Horses kept on pasture are often given concentrates in **hard rubber or plastic feeders**. Some of these troughs are designed to sit directly on the ground, while others have lips that hook over fence boards. These containers vary in size but almost always become soiled with use, particularly if rainfall has left the ground surrounding feeders muddy. Even unanchored fence feeders are frequently dislodged from the fence by aggressive eaters and fall to the ground. By using the same instructions given above for stable buckets, field feeders can be maintained properly.

Keeping outside waterers tidy and free of debris is a job that requires near-daily attention. If **stock tanks** are used, they should be **scrubbed at least weekly** or whenever a hint of algae appears. In spring and summer, these tanks should be dumped more frequently as standing water is the incubation place of choice for disease-carrying insects such as mosquitoes. Waterers are often unwieldy or constructed in such a way that they cannot be dumped. **Concrete waterers** are one example. These large waterers are often four or five feet in diameter, making emptying an unfeasible chore. These tanks should be **scrubbed at least once a week** and preferably more often. A long-handled scrub brush or firm-bristled broom is an effective tool in eliminating grime and algae from waterer surfaces.

Automatic waterers also require daily observation. Foremost, owners must be sure they are functioning properly, so there is no doubt that horses have fresh water available at all times. Many automatic waterers feature removable stainless-steel bowls from which the horses drink. Regularly scrubbing these basins with a scouring pad or sponge will minimize algae buildup. Even if the bowl is not scrubbed, it should be dumped daily as a collection of grit and gravel usually settles to the bottom.