Horse e-News

Research-based news and tips from the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture

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Inside:

It's Cooling Down Out There, Time to Consider Your Horses' Blanketing Needs

Mark Russell, Instructor - Equine

When it comes to blanketing your horse during colder temperatures, there are several considerations to think through. Of course, the first question should be should you even blanket your horse? According to Mark Russell, extension equine specialist for the University of Arkansas Department of Animal Science, it all depends on your situation and the horse.

"If your horse is inside the barn and you're attempting to achieve a slick and shiny coat, then the answer is yes," Russell said. "However, when attempting to keep a slick coat, the horse needs to be under lights (in the barn) for 18 hours a day to simulate sunlight. Simply keeping a blanket on them will not keep them slick."

Russell suggests that if you are keeping the horse outside and are not interested in keeping them slick, then do not blanket them. "Horses grow hair for a reason," he added. "When you blanket them and they have long hair, the blanket will actually push the hair down and keep the hair from doing what it is naturally supposed to do, and that is provide insulation."

Dr. Martha Rasch, clinical instructor and equine ambulatory specialist at the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine, suggests you should observe the overall comfort of the animal and use that as a gauge. "When horses are blanketed prematurely, they will often start sweating or even panting underneath the blanket," she added. "A horse should never be over-blanketed because the sweat will actually often make them colder overall."

Russell added that horses can be turned out with a blanket on, "However, the handler needs to ensure there are no places in the paddock that the blanket can be torn or places where it can get hung up on something and cause injury."

Rasch strongly advises horse owners not to use a regular blanket in place of a horse blanket. "Normal blankets aren't fit or shaped to them and could predispose them to rubbing sores or worse, get tangled in the legs and lead to injury," she said.

According to Rasch, there are temperature guidelines published for blanketing, but they should be used in conjunction with observation of the horse. For example: 55 degrees, no blanket; 45 degrees, rain sheet for turnout in inclement weather; 35 degrees, medium-weight blanket or sheet with fleece liner; 25 degrees, heavy-weight blanket or sheet with fleece liner; and 15 degrees, very heavy-weight blanket or medium-weight blanket with fleece liner.

"Water can be one of the most important factors to consider when trying to protect your horse against the elements," Rasch added. "The better the water seal, the warmer your horse is going to stay. Often a 35-degree rainy day will be much tougher on them than a dry 20-degree day."

Blankets should be cleaned once a month, before the cold season starts and at the end of the cold season. "Blankets should not be washed in machine washer or they will get water logged, rather they should be professionally cleaned or hosed and scrubbed by hand," Rasch said.

To figure out what size blanket your horse needs, Russell suggests that you talk to your local tack store and be aware of your horse' s height and weight (weight can be checked with a weight tape), and they will help you know what size blanket to get.

2011 Southern Regional 4-H Horse Show Wrap-Up

Mary Hightower, Assistant Director - Communications and Marketing

Two Arkansas 4-H'ers each scored a high point title at the 2011 Southern Regional 4-H Horse Show at Tunica, Miss.

Savannah Pelley of Faulkner County left Tunica as the High Point Speed exhibitor. She won the stake race, was second in barrel racing and was fourth in pole bending.

Seth Driggers of Garland County earned High Point Roper after winning first place in tie down roping and third in breakaway roping.

Pelley and Driggers were among about four dozen Arkansas 4-H'ers who made the trip, representing nine counties.

"I'm very proud of how Arkansas was represented in Tunica," said Mark Russell, extension equine specialist with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. "The quality of horses that we have in Arkansas was evident by the results of this regional show. Many of the classes that our youth competed in had nearly 100 entries in them, and for our youth to do well the way we did was extremely exciting."

Here's a look at how Arkansas riders fared at the regional show:

Leila Joy Richardson, Faulkner County – 10th Place, Training Level Dressage

Savanna Woodham, Faulkner County – 10th Place, Non-Trotting Mares

Caitlyn Rains, Crittenden County – 10th Place, Non-Trotting Pleasure

Seth Driggers, Garland County –
- High Point Roper
- 1st Place, Tie Down Roping
- 3rd Place, Breakaway Roping

Britt Driggers, Garland County – 4th Place, Tie Down Roping

Ashley Baugh, Drew County – 1st Place, Breakaway Roping

Savannah Pelley, Faulkner County –
- High Point Speed Exhibitor
- 4th Place, Pole Bending
- 2nd Place, Barrel Racing
- 1st Place, Stake Race

Bailee Birchfield, White County –
- 6th Place, Pole Bending
- 7th Place, Barrel Racing
- 6th Place, Stake Race
- 6th Place, Trail

Lora Beth Koonce, Jefferson County – 1st Place, Western Pleasure

Hannah Henderson, Benton County – 3rd Place, Western Pleasure

Ryan Tutor, Cleburne County – 8th Place, Western Pleasure

Sarah Beth Bates, Pope County – 5th Place, Reining

The show was held July 27-31.

Berryville Clinic and Show Wrap-Up

Mark Russell, Instructor - Equine

The Arkansas Stock Horse Association would like to thank everyone who attended and participated in the Berryville Clinic and Show on August 6 and 7. With many new faces participating during the weekend, the show was deemed a success.

The Arkansas Stock Horse Association promotes the all-around versatility horse and is open to all breeds. If you attend an event put on by the association, you will most likely see a horse that is versatile and can participate in many events as well as handle many of the jobs around the ranch. Each show is accompanied by a clinic the day before. However, the clinic is not a requirement to show but is open to anyone who would like participate, no matter the skill level.

Below is a summary of the all-around winners from the show:

Open – **Gary Webb**
Non-Pro – **Jennifer Sadler**
Limited Non-Pro – **Jill Nulsen**
Green Horse – **Jeremy Cox**
Novice – **Daniel Potter**
Youth – **Taylor Alexis Brandon**

For more information, please contact Nathan Wells at 870-219-3788. You can also visit our web site http://www.arkstockhorse.org/ as well as on Facebook.

Jonesboro Stock Horse Show Wrap-Up

Mark Russell, Instructor - Equine

On October 22 and 23, the Arkansas Stock Horse Association held its third and final clinic and show of the year. The clinic on Saturday boasted 25 participants from all over the state and parts of Missouri. Equally impressive was participation in the show on Sunday. Participants came from Arkansas, Alabama, Missouri and Texas. This was the final clinic and show of the year, but dates and locations are already in place for next year.

All Around Winners

Youth – **Dillon Cox**
Novice – **Stacy Rutledge**
Green Horse – **Jeremy Cox**
Limited Non-Pro – **Lagena Perry**
Non-Pro – **Jeff Gall**
Open – **Stephen Freeman**

2012 Dates and Locations:

April 28-29 – Ozark, Ark. @ Double S arena.
May 19-20 – Searcy, Ark. @ White County Fairgrounds
October 20-21 – Jonesboro, Ark. @ ASU Equine Center

Please check the website as more dates may be added. To learn more about the Arkansas Stock Horse Association, visit www.arstockhorse.org. To learn more about University of Arkansas Extension horse programs, visit http://www.aragriculture.org/horses.htm.

Forage Tips for Fall Pasture

John Jennings, Professor - Forages

The summer heatwave and dry conditions have reduced the hay crop to well below normal, and pastures are drying up quickly all across the state. Producers have several options to make a fall forage crop if conditions improve. Making decisions for fall pasture should begin now to have as much chance as possible for fall grazing. Here are some tips for planning fall grazing options.

Selling Hay Out of State

The Arkansas hay crop is short, but some Mississippi growers indicate they have a good crop for sale. The link to the Mississippi Hay Directory is http://msucares.com/livestock/beef/mshay.html. Another note on hay: Some reports have come back from Oklahoma and Texas regarding hay from Arkansas being sold there. Many Arkansas growers produce top-quality hay. However, one report was that an Arkansas grower represented his hay to the out-of-state buyer as good quality, but the hay that was delivered was nearly all weeds and was very poor. The buyer complained, but the seller would not make it right. Remind your growers that Arkansas producers often need to buy hay from out-of-state sources as well. If a few unscrupulous growers here sell junk hay to out-of-state buyers and ruin Arkansas' reputation for producing good quality hay, they will likely get junk hay back the next time they are in need of hay.

Irrigation Planning for Forages

Many questions have been asked during the summer regarding the potential for irrigating pasture and hay fields. Planning for the necessary water volume is the first step in developing an irrigation program. Many producers who irrigate hay fields try to apply one inch of water per week and more under extreme conditions. Irrigation can certainly ensure a forage crop in years such as this one, but a large volume of water is required. To put it in perspective, one acre-inch of water is equivalent to 27,154 gallons. For an irrigation system to cover one acre per hour with one inch of water, the required pumping volume must be 453 gallons per minute, assuming no efficiency loss in the system. At that rate, 24 acres could be covered in 24 hours. A well producing a volume of only 40 gallons per minute would take 11.3 hours to apply one acre-inch of water. A reservoir with a surface area of 5 acres and an average depth of 10 feet (not just the deep end) would contain 16.3 million gallons of water. Since most reservoirs have a shallow end that tapers down to the deep end, and if the deepest point is 10 feet, the reservoir would have about half that volume or 8.2 million gallons. The total volume of water in a reservoir of that size would provide one acre-inch of water one time for 300 acres or would cover 75 acres with one acre-inch four times. Under current weather conditions, evaporation losses can be over 1/8 inch per day, so the 5-acre reservoir would be losing at least 17,000 gallons per day from evaporation, assuming no additions from rainfall or natural springs.

Stockpiled Bermudagrass (also Bahiagrass and Dallisgrass)

Warm-season grasses can be stockpiled for fall and early winter grazing. This is a very reliable practice and should be a part of all pasture programs that are dominant warm-season grass forage. The field should be clipped or grazed by early to mid-August then fertilized with 50-60 pounds/acre of nitrogen by mid-August in north Arkansas and by late August to the first week of September in south Arkansas. The forage should be allowed to grow until late October to early November, much like a fall hay crop, but it should be strip-grazed instead of harvested. Each bale of hay costs about $25 to produce, so letting the cows harvest the standing forage is much cheaper. On the flip side, if a field situation does not allow grazing (rented land, no fence or water, etc.), there is still time to make a fall hay cutting using the same management as for stockpiled bermudagrass. Forage quality of late summer bermudagrass is very good. Typical yields range from 2,000 to 4,000 pounds/acre.

Stockpiled Fescue

Stockpiled fescue makes good grazing from December through February. This is a very reliable practice and should be a part of all pasture programs with dominant cool-season grass forage. We stockpile fescue every year for the 300 Days Grazing Project at the Livestock and Forestry Branch Station near Batesville, and it even worked well last year in an extremely dry fall season. Clip or graze the field by early September and fertilize with 50-60 pounds/acre of nitrogen the first week of September in north Arkansas and by late September in south Arkansas. Fescue will grow as long as the temperatures are above 40° F, so grazing can be deferred until December. Forage quality of fall growth is very good. Typical yields range from 2,000 to 3,000 pounds/acre.

Winter Annuals

Wheat, rye, winter oats and ryegrass are all good options for fall and winter pasture. If fall forage is needed, planting on a tilled seedbed will probably be necessary. Sod-seeded winter annuals planted into bermudagrass usually do not produce much forage until late winter. At the Livestock and Forestry Branch Station near Batesville, wheat is planted on a tilled seedbed for pasture during Labor Day week every year and is usually ready to graze by early to mid-November. Fertilize according to soil test recommendations for winter annual pasture. Winter annuals can also be sod-seeded in October in fields after cattle are moved to stockpiled bermudagrass pasture. These later planted winter annual pastures will be ready to graze in February or March. A key point this year will be to find and secure a seed source early. The drought in Texas and Oklahoma will likely result in producers in those states planting a tremendous acreage of winter annuals to make up for the short hay crop. That could put pressure on the seed supply.

Forage Brassica

Turnips, radishes and rape are all fall crops that can produce good forage before cold weather. In one demonstration last fall, forage turnips planted on tilled soil on September 4 produced 1,850 pounds dry matter per acre by October 22. The seeding rate for turnips

is 5 pounds/acre. Turnips can be planted with wheat or ryegrass to add more forage. We have tried planting turnips with different methods over the past couple of years and have found that some methods that work well for planting small grains and ryegrass do not work for turnips. In our experience, broadcasting seed in short grass sod and covering with a tire drag does not work well, and planting in October is too late. Turnips and other forage brassicas are best planted by early September on a tilled seedbed. Do not plant the seed too deep. Roll or cultipack the seedbed, broadcast the seed and lightly roll or cultipack to cover the seed. A harrow or field cultivator will likely cover the seed too deep. Fertility management is very similar to that for wheat or ryegrass – about 50-60 pounds/acre of N and apply P and K according to soil test for winter annual pasture. Turnip leaves do not contain a lot of fiber. It is best to plant them in combination with small grains or ryegrass or limit-graze them to reduce digestive problems in animals that consume too much.

Strip-Grazing or Limit Grazing

Withering pastures will force early hay feeding without rain soon. Look at the amount of forage standing in the fields, and estimate how long each field can be grazed by the herd. Close the gates and graze each pasture similar to feeding hay. Be sure to keep cattle off previously grazed pastures to protect any regrowth. A single-strand electric polywire works very well for limit grazing or strip-grazing pastures. Strip-grazing works well on stockpiled forages and winter annual forages. Demonstration results show that strip-grazing results in twice as many grazing days per acre as continuous grazing the entire pasture. That can save a lot of hay feeding and stretch a short forage supply.

Fertilizer Application for Fall Forages

It is difficult to convince producers to apply fertilizer to dry soil during late summer heat to produce a fall forage crop. We have observed, over 13 years of stockpiled forage demonstrations, that if fertilizer or poultry litter are not applied, fall forage growth is poor. In some cases where a hay field was well-fertilized in summer, good fall stockpiled bermudagrass growth occurred in the fall with no additional fertilizer. Very few stockpiled forage demonstrations were conducted where fertilizer application did not save money compared to the cost of hay. Remember, ammonium nitrate, ammonium sulfate and calcium nitrate fertilizers do not volatilize. Urea can volatilize from the soil surface. Arkansas research trials have shown a range of 0 to 29 percent lower yield of bermudagrass from urea than from ammonium nitrate. Research has shown that Agrotain significantly reduces N volatilization from urea, but the addition of Agrotain to urea did not significantly improve stockpiled fescue yield in four Missouri trials or bermudagrass yield in five Arkansas trials. A significant response to Agrotain was found in one 2007 Arkansas bermudagrass trial. The reason for the low forage yield response to Agrotain in these trials is not known. If urea is significantly cheaper than ammonium nitrate per unit of N, it may still be more economical to apply it at a slightly higher rate. Applications made shortly before rainfall have greatly reduced losses from volatilization.

Each year when pastures get short, hungry livestock may graze some plants that would normally be ignored. Cattle moved to new pasture may eat toxic weeds they have not been exposed to previously. Feeding hay if necessary may prevent livestock from becoming hungry enough to eat toxic plants. Common toxic weeds in and around pastures include poison hemlock, wild cherry trees, hemp dogbane, perilla mint, partridge pea and johnsongrass. Many landscape plants including Japanese yew can be very toxic. Many of these plants can remain toxic even in dry hay, so be careful about baling that patch of weedy grass on the neighbor's place just to get a few more bales of hay. Check it out first. If the toxic weeds are in patches, mowing or raking around the patches will avoid the toxic weeds, but scattered infestations make that option unfeasible.

2012 Horse Events

March 19-22 – Spring Break Horse Camp @ 4-H Center and Diamond TR Ranch. Mark Russell (501-671-2190)

April 13-14 – Horse Festival, Fayetteville, Pauline Whitaker Arena. Mark Russell (501-671-2190)

June 2 – NW District Horse Show, Fayetteville, Pauline Whitaker Arena. Mark Russell (501-671-2190)

June 12 – North District Horse Show, Harrison, Northwest Arkansas District Fairgrounds. Mark Russell (501-671-2190)

June 26 – Delta District Horse Show, Searcy, White County Fairgrounds. Mark Russell (501-671-2190)

July 17-19 – State Horse Show, Searcy, White County Fairgrounds. Mark Russell (501-671-2190)

August 1-5 – Southern Regional 4-H Horse Show, Georgia National Fairgrounds, Perry, Ga. Mark Russell (501-671-2190)