

Mucking Out & Bedding

Mucking out

When a horse is stabled it requires 'mucking out' on a daily basis, which involves removing the droppings and soiled bedding. If the horse is stabled throughout the day as well as at night, regular 'skipping out' to remove soiled bedding is also necessary. Although not a glamorous task it is an essential one as standing on a urine soaked surface can be very detrimental to a horse's overall condition.

Tools required to muck out depend on the type of bedding used but generally a 'mucksack', wheelbarrow, fork, shovel and broom are the basic kit. If bedding on straw, a straw fork is used and a shavings fork is used with a shavings bed.



Types of bedding

Straw

Straw is the most common type of bedding because it is quite absorbent, relatively inexpensive, warm and easy to maintain. There are several varieties including:

Wheat straw

Wheat straw makes excellent bedding provided it is baled correctly and it is still the most popular choice. Wheat straw is cheap, easily available, absorbent, warm and easy to muck out. It is also easy to dispose of as it rots down well and makes a good garden fertiliser. However, it has a tendency to be very dusty and is not good for horses with dust allergies.

Barley Straw

Barley straw is longer, better quality and a brighter colour than wheat straw, which can make it more expensive. It is very palatable, which can cause problems with greedy horses.

Oat Straw

Oat straw is also fairly palatable but is not as absorbent as wheat or barley straw. It has the tendency to be dusty and can be expensive but it does give a clean and bright appearance and can be disposed of very easily.



Shavings

Wood shavings have become very popular over recent years, as they are very absorbent and easy to muck out. Only shavings that have been made specifically for horses should be used, as they will have been treated to remove dust and rubbish. Shavings are easy to dispose of and are good for horses that are allergic to dust or tend to eat straw bedding. However, they can be expensive and take a long time to rot down if left on a muckheap.



Shredded paper

Shredded paper is one of the cheapest forms of bedding available and is becoming increasingly popular. It is easy to use and store and is totally dust free so perfect for horses with respiratory problems. Paper is a lot cleaner than other bedding types, although the ink can rub off onto the horses' coat. It is easy to dispose of but can be blown around by the wind and can get very heavy when wet.

Hemp

Hemp is a natural fibre derived from the hemp plant. Although it can be quite expensive it is economical as there is less required and it has great absorbency qualities. It makes a very soft bed, is dust free and breaks down very quickly.

Cardboard

Cardboard is a relatively new type of bedding which is cheap, 100% dust free and one of the most absorbent beddings available on the market. It has the same warmth and storage qualities as straw and shavings and is very clean and easy to manage.



Mucking Out Made Easy

1. When mucking out, the horse should be tied up outside the stable if possible so as to avoid injury from any of the equipment. If the horse has to remain in the stable leave the wheelbarrow and implements outside and use a mucksack to carry the droppings and soiled bedding to the wheelbarrow.
2. Start by removing the droppings with a fork and placing them in the mucksack/wheelbarrow.
3. Separate the clean from the dirty bedding and put to one side so that it can be re-used.
4. Remove the soiled bedding and then sweep the floor. If the floor is very wet ideally leave bedding up for a few hours to allow the floor to dry.
5. The bed can then be put down, using the old material to create the base and then add clean bedding to build up the walls into banks, which help to keep draughts out and protect the horse if it rolls.
6. The bed should be thick enough so that when you stab a fork into it, you can't feel the floor.
7. Empty the wheelbarrow onto a muckheap and put the tools away safely.

Top Tips

- Concrete floors can make the stable cold so use extra bedding to create a warm base for the horse to lie down.
- Use rubber mats under the bedding. This protects the horse from the cold, hard floor and means you don't have to use as much bedding.
- Keep the stable clean during the day by 'skipping out' (removing the droppings) regularly.
- Every couple of weeks totally clear out the stable and deodorise the floor with an anti-ammonia product to get rid of any bad odours and ensure the floor has a chance to air.