

A Guide to Rugging Your Horse

If you want to rug up your horse in winter there are an enormous variety of rugs to choose from. When choosing your rug take into consideration your horses needs, their living conditions, what exercise they are doing and also personal requirements.

Not all horses need to have rugs for warmth if their coats are sufficiently thick but rugs are also useful for keeping the horse clean and maintaining their condition.

There are different types of rug available for every eventuality; whether your horse lives in or out, is clipped or not, has a thin or thick skin, the breed of horse it is, the conditions in which it is kept and the season. When deciding which rugs you need, and indeed if you need one at all, it is helpful to understand what is available and the different functions each rug performs.



Turnout rugs

Turnout rugs are ideal for protecting horses from the cold and wet. They come in three different weights; lightweight, medium or heavyweight. The weight refers to the amount of 'fill' in the rug and therefore how warm it will be. Lightweight rugs provide the least insulation and heavyweight the most. In winter, medium or heavyweight rugs are the most appropriate and which type you use depends entirely on your horse. Make sure when you are buying a turnout rug that it is labeled waterproof, although this only applies to the fabric and not the fastenings, and also breathable. If the fabric is not breathable the horse will perspire and condensation will form on the underside of the rug. When the temperature drops in the evening this could result in a horse catching a chill.

New Zealand rugs

New Zealand rugs are made of waterproof canvas and do not have any insulation. They are one of the oldest and most reliable forms of turnout rug although their popularity has declined in recent years as they are bulky and can rub. They tend to be less expensive than other turnout rugs and are ideal if you don't want to spend too much money and want a rug purely to keep your horse dry in the wet.

Combo rugs

Combo rugs are rugs that have a neck part permanently attached. These rugs are easy to put on and keep your horse extra snug and clean. The disadvantage of having a permanently attached neckpiece is that if the weather is slightly warmer you cannot remove it. However, if your horse is reasonably hardy it will only need a rug in extreme conditions so it is ideal.

Stable rugs

Stable rugs are necessary if your horse is clipped or very thin skinned. A stabled horse needs more insulation than one kept outside as it is unable to move around and keep warm. These rugs are not waterproof and, like turnout rugs, made in different thicknesses.

Coolers

Coolers are designed to help your horse dry off after exercise while keeping them warm, which helps the muscles to cool down slowly and avoid chills. In addition they wick away the moisture from the horse's body, which helps to avoid skin conditions. They can be used under a stable rug or on their own, again, depending on the type of horse and the conditions

Fleeces

Fleeces are light stable rugs that can also be used for travelling. They are very versatile and are also used under a normal stable rug to provide extra warmth.

Sizing

Rugs are sized at 3inch (75mm) intervals. To work out what size your horse is, measure in a straight line from the middle of their chest, around the shoulder, along the side of the belly and around behind the tail. Horses will often fall in between two different sizes and you will have to make the decision whether to buy a size too large or small. When making this decision remember that winter rugs will often be a tighter fit because of the extra padding.

Budget and cost

As with everything in life 'you get what you pay for'. If you buy the cheapest rug you can find the likelihood is it will not last. That does not mean to say that the most expensive rug will be the best but there is a happy medium between the two.

Rug Type	Price Range
Stable rug (lightweight)	£30 - £80
Stable rug (medium weight)	£35 - £85
Stable rug (heavyweight)	£37 - £90
Turnout rug (lightweight)	£35 - £165
Turnout rug (medium weight)	£50 - £175
Turnout rug (heavyweight)	£60 - £230
Combo rug (lightweight)	£50 - £100
Combo rug (medium weight)	£80 - £185
Combo rug (heavyweight)	£90 - £250

A New Zealand can cost anything from about £50, a cooler from £30 and a fleece from £20. A separate neckpiece will cost anything from £20 upwards. The price does depend on the make of the rug and the manufacturer and it is worth having a good look around to find the best deal.

Cleaning and mending

It is essential that all rugs are thoroughly cleaned at least once a year to remove any dirt or grease that can build up on the inside and rub the horse. New Zealand rugs will need to be waterproofed as well and turnout rugs will need to be checked to ensure they are still waterproof. Refer to the care label on the inside of the rug before you start but it is a good idea to take turnout or other waterproof rugs to a specialist as you can damage the waterproofing. The other rugs can be washed with a small amount of detergent but if you are at all worried take them with the others to a professional.

It is essential you check the stitching, waterproofing and buckles regularly and have them mended if and when there is a problem. This should be done by a professional as the stitching is highly skilled and integral to keeping the rug safe for the horse. Your local saddler can usually recommend someone to clean and mend rugs and it is advisable to get them done in plenty of time for the winter so you are prepared for the cold weather.

TOP TIPS FOR RUGGING A HORSE IN WINTER

- Check stitching and whether the rug is waterproof
- Remove rugs often to check for rubbing and the horse's condition
- Monitor the horse's weight and condition regularly
- Have a spare rug as backup in wet weather
- Have somewhere dry to hang wet rugs
- Replace a wet rug with a dry one
- Check your horse is not over heating on warmer days
- Check rugs twice daily as straps can break, come undone and get tangled or allow the rug to slip