

Stable Maintenance

Stables are generally in almost constant use and need regular maintenance to ensure your horse is safe as well as comfortable and healthy. August and September are the ideal months to give them a thorough overhaul as the weather should be dry and the stable will then be ready for your horse if he is kept in during the winter.

Keeping ammonia at bay

Whatever bedding you use it is a good idea to empty your stables at least once a year, give them a thorough clean and then re-paint them. Cleaning is not only an important part of the preparation for painting but it also gets rid of unwanted germs. Ammonia is the biggest problem that needs to be eradicated in this process because it is harmful to horses' health.

Ammonia is a noxious gas and causes the throat burning smell that is sometimes present in stables. It is produced from urea, which is passed in a horse's urine or faeces and can cause respiratory problems in horses. The most common of these is COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), also known as 'heaves', which is an asthma-like condition. Ammonia exposure increases a horse's risk of catching pneumonia. For horses left standing in wet bedding for long periods, ammonia can also reduce their hoof integrity.

To remove ammonia, wash your stables with a strong detergent. Ask at your local saddlers which is the best and if you have rubber matting check with the manufacturer which detergents can be used. Pay particular attention to holes and cracks in the floor, as these are areas where ammonia will thrive. If the smell returns you will know the process needs repeating. There are products on the market that can be used on a weekly basis to keep ammonia at bay. Again ask your local saddlers what they recommend.

Check for damage

If you are painting your stables or field shelters you must leave them to dry for a few days after washing. Paint will not stick to damp walls and you will end up having to re-do the job. This is also a good opportunity to check the exterior of the stables.

The majority of external deterioration will be caused by water damage, especially if your stables are made of wood. All



paint wears away eventually, particularly on the south and west aspects where the sun shines. However, if the paint is peeling off in large flakes down to the wood you might have a damp problem and need to get the area looked at by an expert.

Paint or creosote will provide a degree of protection from the weather but need to be re-applied yearly to maintain their effectiveness. Again, it is important that the surfaces are well prepared before you start. Give the walls a good wash down and rub away any lumps, bumps or splinters with sandpaper.

The roof, which is also subject to adverse weather conditions, will need to be checked. Water seepage can damage the electrics, which is potentially hazardous, and draughts make the stables uncomfortable for your horse. It is easy to spot any problem areas with the naked eye but make sure you call in an expert to fix them. If damp has come inside the building get an electrician to check the electrics, lighting and any electric water or feeding systems.

Guttering also needs to be checked as it can fill up with leaves and cause drainage problems. It is also important to ensure that it is in good repair and mend any problem areas.

Windows and doors will also need to be looked at as they are also susceptible to wear and tear. Replace any broken panes of glass or rotting frames and check hinges and bolts. These will benefit from a good oiling to ensure they continue to work smoothly. Finally tighten up any loose nails or screws.

A fresh coat of paint

Once all these checks have been made you are ready to paint your stables inside and out. Make sure you use a hardwearing paint and ask in the shop which product will be most suitable if you are unsure. Putting masking tape around the windows and floor level will stop unwanted areas being painted. If you are using creosote on the outside of the buildings it is a good idea to wear gloves and protective clothing.

Once all these jobs have been completed, walk round your stables to make sure you have not left any nails lying around or bits of wood poking out that could hurt your horse. The stables will then be protected from the weather for another year and you can rest easy knowing your horse will be warm, dry and safe when inside.

Rubber matting

Rubber matting is a good investment for your stables as it is hard wearing and durable. It is expensive but you will save money on bedding in the long run. Horses can comfortably lie down on the matting and only need a small area of bedding for going to the loo. This makes mucking out much quicker.



Matting is more hygienic than traditional bedding as it reduces the risk of a build up of ammonia and dust levels. This is particularly beneficial for horses with respiratory problems and the cushioning effect will help horses with bad legs. In terms of comfort the matting provides good insulation and prevents the 'rising cold' you get from a traditional concrete floor.

The mats can either be permanently fixed or removable. If you opt for the removable ones, make sure they are not too heavy as you will need to take them out of the stable and wash them down once or twice a week. The advantage of fixed matting is that the seal prevents urine seeping to the floor below, further reducing the risk of ammonia.

Surfaces vary from raised bumps to ridges and geometrical shapes. The deciding factor when choosing the surface is how much grip your horse needs - a horse living in will have cleaner hooves and be less in need of grip than one living out with muddy hooves.

There are a lot of companies that specialise in rubber matting and it is difficult to know which to use. Equi-Mat is one of the best and supplies many veterinary practices and racing yards but it is also expensive. It is worth haggling as there is always a deal to be done. Many companies will have reduced rates at shows so it is worth finding out if there are any coming up near you that have a mat company attending.