



Blanketing Horses in Cold Weather: Is it Necessary?

Horses are very adaptable to cold weather and can tolerate temperatures as low as 5°F as long as they have a winter hair coat, shelter and proper nutrition. In fact, blanketing horses that have long winter coats can cause more harm than good. Their winter coat acts as insulation by trapping air. Blankets compress the long hair and reduce the horse's ability to stay warm.

When is Cold Weather Blanketing Necessary?

- Horses that are body clipped
- Wet weather (rain is worse than snow because it saturates the coat)
- Horses that do not have a thick winter coat
- Horses that are not acclimated to cold weather climates
- Extreme drops in temperature when horses aren't acclimated
- Old horses (may have reduced ability to maintain body temperature compared to healthy adult horses)
- Young horses (horses under 2 years old are still growing which requires more energy; their smaller body surface area will lose heat faster than large horses)

Tips for Blanketing

- Check horses often to make sure they are not sweating and are dry under the blanket
- Only waterproof and breathable blankets should be used for turnout
- Use appropriate blanket weight for climate (blankets are available in light, medium and heavy weights)
- For horses that are clipped, the blanket weight will depend on whether they have a full body clip, hunter clip, blanket clip, or trace clip
- Make sure the blanket is the correct size (measure from center of chest to point of rump)
- Check to make sure the blanket isn't causing rubs
- Never put a blanket on a dirty horse

The best way to keep horses warm is to feed plenty of good quality hay and provide shelter from the elements. Good quality hay provides nutrients and calories, while generating body heat through fiber digestion. Horses should be fed around 2% of their bodyweight in hay per day in the winter (about 20lb for a 1,000 lb horse). Consider that the average cost of a medium weight turnout blanket is \$200. Two hundred dollars would buy about 30 square bales of good quality hay! Thirty bales of good quality hay will last about 2 months for one horse in the winter. Unless blanketing is necessary, it's typically in the best interest of the horse to spend the money on good nutrition rather than a blanket.