

Horses require room to exercise. If a horse is kept in a pasture, the amount of land needed for basic maintenance varies with climate, an animal needs more land for grazing in a dry climate than in a moist one. However, an average of between one and three acres of land per horse will provide adequate forage in much of the world, though feed may have to be supplemented in winter or during periods of drought. To lower the risk of laminitis, horses also may need to be removed from lush, rapidly changing grass for short periods in the spring and fall (autumn), when the grass is particularly high in non-structural carbohydrates such as fructans. If the terrain does not provide natural shelter in the form of heavy trees or other windbreaks, an artificial shelter must be provided; a horse's insulating hair coat works less efficiently when wet or when subjected to wind, horses that cannot get away from wind and precipitation put unnecessary energy into maintaining core body warmth and may become susceptible to illness. Some horses are turned out in a natural setting during the winter or when retired from work. However, even in these cases, animals need to be checked frequently for evidence of injury, parasites, sickness or weight loss. Horses cannot live for more than a few days without water. Therefore even in a natural, semi-feral setting, a check every day is recommended; a stream or irrigation source can dry up, ponds may become stagnant or develop toxic blue-green algae, a fence can break and allow escape, poisonous plants can take root and grow; windstorms, precipitation, or even human vandalism can create unsafe conditions.

Fences and pens

Wood and wood-like synthetics are classic and attractive forms of fencing. Horses evolved to live on prairie grasslands and to cover long distances unfettered by artificial barriers. Therefore, when fenced in, accident potential must be considered. Horses will put their heads and legs through fences in an attempt to reach forage on the other side. They may run into fences if chased by another animal, or even when running at play if the fence (such as a wire fence) is not particularly visible. The smaller the area, the more visible and substantial a fence needs to be. For exercise alone, a pen, run, corral or "dry lot" without forage can be much smaller than a pasture, and this is a common way that many horses are managed; kept in a barn with a turnout run, or in a dry lot with a shelter, feeding hay, allowing either no pasture access, or grazing for only a few hours per day. Outdoor turnout pens range greatly in size, but 12 feet (4 m) by 20 to 30 feet (9 m) is a bare minimum for a horse that does not get ridden daily. To gallop for short stretches, a horse needs a "run" of at least 50 to 100 feet (30 m). When kept in a dry lot, a barn or shelter is a must. If kept in a small pen, a horse needs to be worked regularly or turned out in a larger area for free exercise.

Fences and pens must be sturdy. In close quarters, a horse may contact the fence frequently. Wire is very dangerous in any small pen. Pens are often made of metal pipe, or wood. Larger pens are sometimes enclosed in closely woven mesh, sometimes called "no climb" fencing. However, if a wire mesh is used in a small pen, the openings must be too small for a horse hoof to pass through.

Types of fencing

One danger of a wire fence is that it is practically invisible; a running animal may not see the fence until it is too late to avoid running into it. Over vast areas, barbed wire is often seen in

some parts of the world, but it is the most dangerous fencing material that can be used around horses, even in a large pasture. If a horse is caught in barbed wire, it can quickly become severely hurt, often leaving lasting scars or even permanent injuries. Horse management books and periodicals are nearly universal in stating that barbed wire should never be used to contain horses. However, this advice is widely ignored, particularly in the western United States. Various types of smooth wire fencing, particularly when supported by a strand of electric fence, can be used to enclose a large pasture of several acres, and is one of the least expensive fencing options. A wire fence should have at least four, preferably five strands to provide adequate security. However, even without sharp barbs, wire has the highest potential for horses to become tangled in the fence and injured. If used, it must be properly installed and kept tight through regular maintenance. Visibility is also an issue; a horse galloping in an unfamiliar pasture may not see a wire fence until it is too late to stop.

A heavy woven mesh with closely spaced strands is relatively safe for horses, as they cannot easily break the fence nor put a foot through it. Woven mesh wire is safer but more expensive than strands of smooth wire. It is more difficult to install, and has some visibility issues, but horses are less likely to become tangled in it or be injured if they run into it. Adding a top rail of wood or synthetic material increases visibility of the fence and prevents it from being bent by horses reaching over it. A strand of electric fence may also keep horses from pushing on a mesh fence. Mesh fencing needs to be heavy-gauge wire, woven, not welded, and the squares of the mesh should be too small for a horse to put a foot through. "Field fence" or "no-climb" fences are safer designs for horse pens than more widely woven "sheep fence." Chain link fence is occasionally seen, but horses can bend chain link almost as easily as a thinner-gauge wire, so the additional expense is often not justified by any gain over good-quality woven wire.

Electric fencing made of modern synthetic materials with fine wire interwoven throughout make a visible and inexpensive fence. Use of plastic posts allows a temporary fence to be set up and moved easily as needed. An electric fence such as this is good for dividing up a grazing area, but should not be used as a boundary fence or in areas where animals will put a lot of pressure on the fence. Electric fence comes in many styles of wire, rope and webbing, and is particularly useful for internal division of pastures. It carries only a mild charge that causes a noticeable shock, but no permanent injury to animals or people. It is relatively inexpensive and is easy to install, but if electricity fails, it is easily broken. It is excellent both as a temporary fence and, in single strands, as a top or middle barrier to keep horses away from conventional fencing. There is some danger that horses can become tangled in an electric fence, though because the materials are finer, it usually breaks, stopping the current, though injuries are still possible. Because electricity can fail, it should not be the sole fencing used on property boundaries, particularly next to roads, though a strand on top may be used to keep a horse from leaning over a fence made of other materials. Nor should it be used alone in small pens where horses may accidentally bump into it on a regular basis. However, small single-horse enclosures are sometimes seen at endurance riding competition, where temporary fencing must be set up in remote areas. In residential areas, warning signs should be posted on any boundary fences with electrified sections to keep people from touching the fence and accidentally being shocked.

Wood is the "classic" form of horse fencing, either painted planks or natural round rails. It is one of the safest materials for containing horses. Wood or a synthetic material with similar properties is the best option for small paddocks, pens and corrals. It can be used to fence pastures and has some ability to give or break if a horse collides with it. However, wood is

expensive, high maintenance and not completely without safety concerns; boards can splinter; nails can stick out and cause lacerations. Wood-like synthetics are even more expensive, but are often safer and lower maintenance.

A welded pipe fence will not break. Cable of various sorts is sometimes used for horse fencing, and, especially if combined with a top rail or pipe or wood, can be reasonably safe. However, if cable is not kept tight, like wire, horses can be tangled in it. However, it not only cannot break but unlike wire, it also cannot easily be cut by humans. Its advantage over wire is that it poses less of a risk of entanglement. It is often less expensive than wood or pipe, has some give if a horse runs into it, and requires relatively little maintenance. Metal pipe is often used for fences instead of wood and if properly installed, can be fairly safe in the right circumstances. Pipe is often the most expensive fencing option, but is low maintenance and is very strong. Pipe will generally not give or break if it is run into or if the horse puts a foot through it, which can itself be a potential injury risk; horse owners debate the relative merits and dangers of pipe versus wood for horse fencing. Usually pipe is most suitable for very small areas such as pens where a horse may often bump or test the fence, but will not be at risk of colliding with the fence at full speed.

Solid wall masonry fences, typically either brick or fieldstone, are a type of horse fencing with an ancient tradition. Advantages of stone fences are high visibility, durability, strength and safety. Horses cannot get caught or tangled in them, put legs through, and if a horse runs into one, the impact is spread over much of the body, rather than concentrated on a single spot. They will last for decades with only minor repairs. The major disadvantage is the cost: the materials are expensive, fences require skilled labor for proper construction, and take longer to build.