

Hemp Bedding and the Health Benefits It Offers to Horses

Horse owners have many options when it comes to bedding in the stalls of their horses.

Some may choose straw because it is more readily available in their area whereas others may choose wood shavings because they absorb more moisture.

Hemp bedding is a relatively new product on the market which may address many of the things a horse owner considers when choosing the right bedding.

Health and Happiness Starts with Breathing

A healthy horse has an unobstructed and well-functioning respiratory system. Equines use their noses to clear irritants from their respiratory tract (dust, ammonia, and bacteria). Nasal discharge, coughing and sneezing are signs a horse may be suffering with respiratory issues. Dust, bacteria, mould and ammonia levels can irritate the horse's respiratory tract and cause breathing difficulties and bedding is a major source of this irritant.

Hemp bedding is extremely low in dust, hemp is cleaned to remove harmful particulates that cause respiratory issues. This is critical to limiting respiratory and other health risks. Hemp has no phenols and is not palatable to horses, further increasing its health benefits.

Born in a Barn?

Ammonia odours can further cause respiratory issues in Equines. A 2001 study by the Equine Pulmonary Laboratory at Michigan State University's School of Veterinary Medicine found that young horses stabled during training suffered respiratory distress when compared to pastured horses of the same age. While dust and mould in feed and bedding played a part in pulmonary problems, exposure to ammonia also negatively impacts their respiratory systems.

Many types of bedding allow urine to spread along the floor of the stall.

Hemp is a natural absorbent and is about 60% cellulose compared to 40-45% in wood products. Hemp bedding keeps the surface clean and dry while the odours and urine become trapped under the surface. Furthermore, hemp effectively coats scat by creating a "clumping" of the product, allowing for easy removal.

Don't Be in a Thrush

Thrush occurs when equines are standing in wet or urine-soaked conditions. The responsible organism, *Sphaerophorus neophorus*, eats away at the tissues of the frog, leaving a blackish ooze on the surface. Thrush rarely causes lameness and poses no major health hazard. But if you encounter the condition in your barn, you will want to review, and probably revise, your management routine. Hemp bedding reduces the fungal and bacterial growth associated with urine and wet stall conditions, giving equines a sure footed and safe bedding alternative. Hemp has been confirmed to have great antibacterial activity (Cellulose 2013).

An Apple a Day

Hemp bedding is widely recommended by veterinary clinics. Although they have seen great success treating horses with heaves (Heaves is a chronic, non-infectious airway condition of horses that also is called **recurrent airway obstruction**, or RAO, and was formerly known as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD. The disease occurs in horses more than 6 years of age and is the result of an allergic reaction to inhaled particles.) and other respiratory issues. This article is no way meant to replace a Veterinarian's advice or diagnosis of a given horse's condition. This information is meant

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to provide better understanding of how the choice of Hemp as an animal bedding will minimize the likelihood of occurrence of performance-reducing respiratory conditions. Respiratory conditions can be addressed through sound stable management practices focused on reducing the levels of dust and airborne particulate matter.

Starting to use Linen Flax Horse Bedding

Please follow these suggestions to get the absolute best for your Horses comfort.

Putting Down Your Flax Bed

Solid Floor (no rubber matting)

12' x 12' without banks

7 - 8 bales

Empty the correct no. of bales on floor, track them in with your feet. It may go against your thoughts but add water if preferred, to establish as firm a base to the bed as possible. The bed will move a little initially and will settle in 7/10 days. Settled depth needs to be c.8" (20 cm)

Rubber Matting

12' x 12' with rubber matting

5 - 7 bales

Cover at least half the total area to a depth of 6" to 8". The bed will settle well in 7/10 days but must have a good depth in order to absorb the wet. Create a firm edge by brushing the rubber matting up to the bed line.

Changing to Linen Flax from Existing Bedding

Straw bed: take all the straw out.

Shavings or hemp bed: Ideally remove existing bed. However if clean, top up with Linen Flax until original bed has gone. Full benefits of Linen Flax will not be apparent until old bed has gone.

Maintaining and managing the Linen Flax Bed

Remove droppings regularly, with rubber gloves or fork. Droppings will become easier to remove as the bed becomes established. Only remove wet material once or twice a week, topping up with sides or banks, and then top up sides with fresh material. Use a bedding fork to rake over surface, giving the bed a fresh, level finish, but **disturb the under-part of the bed as little as possible.**

Linen Flax is a high performance bedding and, as such, needs care to maximise its benefits to both user and horse.

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