

Little Hooves 4-H Club
Suffield, CT
Care and Feeding of Miniature Horses Part I

(As done at On Target Miniatures)

In general, miniature horse care is very similar to caring for larger equines except minis eat about 1/4 as much as a normal size riding horse. Veterinary costs are the same and farrier (hoof care) costs are usually less because minis don't wear shoes. Horses need vaccinations at least twice a year and will get worms if they are not treated either daily or every few weeks with some form of wormer. Hooves need to be trimmed every 6-8 weeks just like big horses.

Feeding

Most of our miniatures weigh between 200 and 350 pounds (Toffee is at the high end). All horses need to eat 1-2% of their body weight each day, mostly in the form of "forage". Forage can be pasture or some type of hay, or even pellets or "cubes" made from hay. Horses should be fed at least twice a day and ours are fed 4 times a day. In the wild horses eat almost continuously, so more frequent feedings are definitely better, but not always possible. The amount of protein is an important consideration in the diet, especially for pregnant mares and young, growing horses. Grain is usually added to the diet to provide enough protein to meet those needs. A source of clean, unfrozen water and a salt block or other source of salt are also needed. Vitamins and supplements to address special needs may also be added to the diet.

Hay

We feed second cutting hay to our minis, which is cut and baled in late summer or early fall and is usually finer than first cutting hay available in June. Hay should be greenish in color, smell pleasant, be dust-free and contain NO mold. Mold will happen if the hay is rained on or not gets wet at some point and is very bad for horses. Moldy bales are often heavier, the "flakes" stick together, and the hay will be very dusty and smelly. Any moldy hay must be thrown out! There are many types of hay but ours is all some type of grass hay and is grown locally. We weigh a 1 pound sample of hay every so often and use that measure when feeding. We also had the hay tested and the protein content is about 10%, which is typical for grass hay.

Grain

There are many different brands and types of grains available, even some specifically made for minis, so no two farms will likely make the same grain selections. Princess gets a special grain (12% protein) because she is insulin resistant (a condition similar to diabetes) and needs less sugar than found in regular grain. The others all get one of 2 Nutrena grains that are 14% protein. One is a complete feed, meaning it contains forage, that happens to be designed for older horses but is also fine for younger horses. The other is a more general purpose feed and was recommended for pregnant mares and foals. Grain is fed twice a day, morning and evening, (except for young horses) and is measured in household measuring cups. Most get 2 cups a feeding, except young minis, the pregnant mares or those nursing foals, who get more.

Other

Our horses also get soaked beet pulp, which is another form of forage, with their grain. This provides a good way to get more water into them, which is critical in winter and when travelling. It is very common in the diet of show horses. At bedtime, our minis (except Princess & Buckshot) get a small amount of soaked alfalfa cubes,

which they love! Alfalfa contains a lot of calcium, which makes it act a bit like Tums in terms of preventing ulcers which are common in horses. So we feed this when it will be a long time before their next meal.

We buy our hay when available and store in the loft in the barn. Our grain, beet pulp, alfalfa cubes, salt, wormer, vitamins, supplements, and bedding are all ordered on-line from Horses and Hounds in Granby about every 2 weeks and delivered free of charge. The bedding we use is pine pellets which come in plastic bags and have to be wet in order to work. We also use "fine-tines" manure forks which have the tines closer together than regular manure forks. This combination works much better for minis than shavings and regular manure forks!

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