

the quarterly journal of wholistic equine care

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HAY FEEDERS: WASTE NOT, WANT NOT... THE HAY WASTING DILEMMA SOLVED

by Gwenyth Santagate



Freedom Feeder, photo courtesy www.freedomfeeder.com

When feeding hay to horses there is often the complaint about excessive waste of that hay. Feeding it on the ground automatically conjures up the images of trampled, soiled hay. But in reality, horses were designed to eat from ground level. With his head down, the horse is able to relax, clear his bronchial tubes, drain his sinuses, chew properly, and utilize his monocular vision.

So what's the solution? Hay feeders that will contain the hay to keep it clean while making it available free choice (horses *need* forage available at all times), and at a level where the horse can eat with his head in a natural position. Many hold several flakes of hay while some hold full square and/or round bales. Horses are designed to be trickle eaters (not meal eaters or gobblers). Many of the hay feeders on the market today are made with small openings that al-

low just this type of nibbling, promoting a natural feeding rate that helps horses who are over- or under-weight to reach an ideal weight.

Let's take a quick look at the various types of hay feeders that help eliminate much of the waste while improving our horses' overall health and dispositions.



Photo 1

PASTURE FEEDERS:

When feeding free choice hay, consider purchasing large round bales that can be placed in a metal, plastic or molded holder. **Photo 1** shows a simple but versatile livestock bale feeder. This can be purchased at most any agricultural supply house. It's large enough to hold a 4' x 6' round bale and, with its various openings, supplies free choice feeding of hay for multiple animals of various species. Its solid skirt at the base helps avoid hay spillage. This feeder is ideal for pasture use when horses share pasture with other critters and can easily be placed under cover to protect the hay from inclement weather.

The feeder in **Photo 2** has a roof, and one side completely opens to allow easy placement of the round bale. Hay wasted is minimal and the feeder cannot be tipped over by any horse.



Photo 2



Photo 3

An alternative to the metal round feeders is the heavy-duty plastic cover. This 'bag' (**Photo 3**, Big Bale Buddy) will contain up to a 600 lb. round bale of hay and is constructed of heavy duty, polypropylene that is UV protected. It is available in 3 different sizes to accommodate small, medium and large round bales. Laying the feeder on its side and/ or cutting another opening at the other end would maximize the 'grazing' position while the solid 'side' would protect the hay from the weather.

A close cousin to the heavy 'bag' is the netted round bale holder (**Photo 4**). This type of feeder is made of strong, nylon netting. The square holes measure 1.5" so this type is safe for all barefooted horses (shod horses could get their shoes caught in the net),



Photo 4

including minis and ponies, and it encourages trickle feeding. It is lightweight and easy to fill.



Photo 5



Photo 6

Smaller sizes of net feeders (as in the opening photo) are available for lesser amounts of hay, which can be hung (**Photo 5**) between two trees or posts outdoors. One can also be put in the bottom of a heavy duty tub or trough (**Photo 6**) in dry weather to catch small pieces. The smaller netted feeders will easily hold a flake up to a complete rectangular bale.

Photo 7 (The Natural Feeder™) is a lightweight yet durable, recycled-material, weather-resistant polyethylene feeder designed for indoor/ outdoor (and trail) use. Tough grating holds hay down to simulate natural foraging position and to encourage self-regulated feeding. The durable Porta-Grazer (not pictured) allows for hay soaking as well as feeding.



Photo 7



Photo 8

SHED and OTHER FEEDERS:

The net feeders can also be easily hung in the shed or barn (**Photo 8**) to keep the hay protected from the weather. Hanging it from the rafter or ceiling prevents the feeder from collapsing and the horses can't step on the netting as the hay is consumed. This one is safe even for the horse who likes to 'paw' while eating.

The Hay Pocket (**Photos 9a and 9b**) has



Photo 9a (above)

Photo 9b (below)



an easy-to-use wooden dowel hanging system that is simple to open to fill the net pocket. There are no knots in the durable nylon-cord netting so there is nothing for the horse (or other animal) to bite into and pull loose. The square holes measure 1.5" to maximize a normal eating rate while allowing the horse to 'graze' with his head low – as low as you hang it.

The Nibble Net (**Photo 10**) offers small holes that are 1.25" in size, permitting the horse to snatch just one or two stems at a time, thus slowing down the fast eaters. It is easy to load up with a flake of hay and then carry to attach to a fence post, tree or other



Photo 10

secure base. This, too, can be hung lower to the ground for barefoot horses to simulate more natural grazing.

Some great homemade feeders are illustrated on the web. Photos 5, 7, 10 and 11 can be found on www.slowfeeding.com and show great ingenuity as to the various ways hay can be provided.



Photo 11



Photo 12

The homemade feeder in **Photos 11 and 12** does require the use of a safe round pen or fence panel for its construction, as well as some heavy duty plywood.



Photo 13

A hay box feeder (**Photo 13**) that you can make yourself (NHM Volume 11 Issue 6, *Do It Yourself, Make A Haybox*) offers yet another way to serve up hay more naturally - and outdoors - while not wasting it on the ground.

Hay feeders with a grain trough can be used in the shed or stall. **Photo 14** shows a stainless steel feeder that dispenses individual flakes of hay up to 6 times for 'extended grazing'. Battery operated, it fits securely in the corner of the stall or shed. It sits close to the ground for grazing positioning.

There are many models of hay feeders available on the market today. From the simple economy models to the more complex, there's one to fit any horse feeding regime. Whether feeding one horse or many, there's a perfect solution to be found for every horse husbandry situation. ♡



Photo 14

For more information:

www.freedomfeeder.com
www.haypocket.com
www.quicksilverarenas.com/feeders.php
www.hotwoods.com
www.crestviewequine.com/product/SPAS105
www.thenaturalfeeder.com
www.texasbaynet.com
www.porta-grazer.com
www.rockymountainrider.com/articles/2010/1210_new_product_-_slow_bale_buddy.htm
www.thinaircanvas.com/nibblenet/pages/nibblenet-125-frame.htm
www.calabasassaddlery.com/istar.asp?a=29&search=hay+net&x=0&y=0
www.noblepanels.com/feeders.htm
www.swedishhoofschool.com
<http://paddockparadise.wetpaint.com/page/Slow+Feeders>

About the author:

Gwenyth Santagate has lived, played and worked with horses for almost 50 years. Her mission is to give them voices when they have none. She is the founder of PENZANCE Equine Integrated Solutions.

www.thepenzancehorse.com

caballus@charter.net

508-476-1317 (Massachusetts)