



Horse Care Info Sheet

Hay Evaluation Activity

Complete this hands-on activity to determine the quality of a hay bale.

Instructions:

- [Watch this video first](#) to learn what to look at and feel when you are evaluating hay.
- Find a sample of hay. You may search the internet for pictures or other YouTube videos to create your own virtual hay if you do not have access to one.
- [Use this Equine Guelph scorecard](#) to grade your hay sample. Keep a note of what you see as you go through the different categories. Feel free to reach out if you have any questions about the scorecard.
- Read over this [fact sheet from the University of Maryland](#). It goes over each of the different categories on the scorecard and describes why we care about each of these categories (e.g. we care about whether the hay was harvested when the plants were young vs. later in the growing season because this will affect the amount of calories and protein in the hay)



Additional Notes

- It is also important to know that switching a horse's hay can significantly increase the risk of colic. The nutritional composition (e.g. the amount of protein, sugars and types of fibre) can be very different between types of hay. The bacteria in a horse's gut that break hay down need time to adjust to these changes. So, it's very important to slowly switch your horse's hay, and to slowly introduce your horse to pasture after they spend the winter eating hay. See this [Equine Guelph fact sheet](#) to learn more about slowly switching your horse's hay.
- There are some myths out there regarding which cutting of hay is best for horses. Hopefully the activity above will help you learn that other factors, like the maturity of the plant when it was cut, the species in the bale (grass vs. legume), and the "leafiness" of the bale, are more important indicators of the quality of a hay bale. You can read more about this in this [fact sheet](#).