Pasturing a Horse Takes True Diligence. Your Horse May Encounter Poisons Such as Rhubarb & African Violet or Issues Such as Barb Wire, Colic, Laminitis & More.

It’s a Good Time to do a Pasture Safety Check!

Forage is the major portion of a horse's diet. While some horses consume forage from baled or chopped hay sources, others are free to roam the pasture most of the day and consume their daily forage needs by eating grass. There are many things responsible horse owners should do to ensure their pasture grass and grazing area are safe for their horses.

1. **Check your fencing.**
   With many fencing materials on the market, consider what is going to work for your horses and pasture situation. It is strongly advised not to use barbed wire due to injuries. Be sure to check for broken fence, loose poles and other dangers at least once a week to keep your equines confined and safe.

2. **Walk around your land.**
   Look for holes that can catch a hoof or a whole horse. Check for logs, fallen trees and other debris that could be a safety hazard to a curious horse or horses at play. Horses roaming around piles of tires, wires or machinery can quickly find themselves in trouble. Muddy areas also pose a threat for injuries so consider adding extra sand or finding other ways to reduce accumulating mud. Use a breakaway halter if your horse needs to wear one.

3. **Check your horses frequently.**
   Check horses daily for any injuries or signs of lameness or sickness. Horses wearing blankets in wet or winter weather should be checked to ensure the blankets are still secure and correctly placed. Horses can develop scratches, especially in mud, so check legs and hooves too. Pick up
and clean out hooves, which can accumulate rocks or snowballs in the winter.

4. **Keep water available at all times.**
   There should always be a good source of water available in your pasture or paddocks. For a larger area or if you have multiple horses, offer multiple water sources so everyone can have access. Relying on a pond or stream in your pasture is not the best idea. Have a few water troughs at common hangouts and make sure they are checked frequently and cleaned. If you use automatic waterers, inspect them daily.

5. **Look for poisonous plant danger!**
   Do you know what plants or weeds are lurking in your pasture? You may know acorns and buttercups are dangerous to horses, but did you know the list is much longer? Other poisonous plants include impatients, creeping charlie, black locust, african violets, rhubarb, white sweet clover and water hemlock. For a complete list and pictures of these plants, check out Cornell University’s website: [http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html](http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html)

6. **Monitor your herd harmony.**
   All horses should have a chance to play, eat, drink and rest. If your hierarchy is imbalanced, a horse that is low on the totem pole may have difficulty fulfilling these basic needs every day. Horses should have similar personalities when pastured together, especially in a smaller space. If someone is not “fitting in,” move the horse to a location so he/she can eat, drink, rest and play in harmony.

7. **Is pasture the right thing for your horse?**
   If your horse has laminitis, foundered in the past, or has other metabolic issues related to starches and sugars in the diet, a day out in the pasture may not be advised. You may need to limit time on pasture or provide a dry lot. A dry lot can be a dirt paddock, arena or round pen that allows a horse to be outside for exercise, but provides no access to grass. Another way to limit grass consumption is to use a well-fitting grazing muzzle.

8. **Transition slowly.**
   When your horse is new to a pasture lifestyle or is transitioning from a barren pasture to new spring grass, make sure to do so slowly. Start with a 15 to 20-minute session and increase slowly each day. Horses that do not have a slow transition could very quickly suffer from founder or colic. A horse may experience some loose manure that should be monitored as well. The other concern with new spring grass is the higher levels of starches and a sugar present in the growing grass. This is another reason horses with metabolic issues may need to have little to no pasture time to start. This same caution should be considered with fall pastures or pastures under stress (including drought ridden, overeaten and poorly managed pastures). Consult a professional if you are looking to better manage your pasture.

   A watchful eye on your pasture ensures your horses remain safe and healthy in their pasture while they reap the benefits of the outdoors, exercise and natural grazing.