

## **Why Keeping Horses Properly Hydrated During Summertime Is Critical To Equine Health**

**Fresh, Cool Water Is Important For Avoiding Horse Health Problems Such As Colic And Heat Stress.**

*By Dr. Amy M Gill*

Summer is here, and with the heat comes the task of keeping horses watered and hydrated. One of the most difficult aspects of summer horse husbandry is keeping fresh, cool water available at all times. Water availability is vital because horses must use water to cool themselves through evaporative cooling. If horses cannot access water and drink freely, the risk of heat stress and colic greatly increases. Here are some management tips for keeping horses well hydrated, even in the hottest climates:

- Install automatic waterers in pastures to keep a constant supply of fresh water available. They must be cleaned and checked daily to make sure they are working. Some auto waterers have very small bowls and horses can have a hard time getting enough water from them. It might be necessary to install multiple waterers to guarantee all horses get enough.
- Keep water tanks full and clean. Horses will not drink as much if the water is full of debris and algae that fouls the taste. Horses love fresh water!
- Make sure timid horses have access to the water too. If there are more than five horses in the field, install a second tank or waterer. Many bossy horses will stand by and hoard the water, preventing others from drinking.
- Do not dump the tank where the horses drink. This will create a mud puddle that is treacherous and can cause falls. Also, mud is bad for the integrity of the hoof wall and can cause soft, shelly hooves.
- Provide plenty of free choice salt. This will increase thirst and help keep horses drinking.
- Don't count on a pond or a stream to provide quality water. Ponds and streams can contain toxic chemicals or be clogged with algae, which is unhealthy and may discourage drinking.
- Frequently change the tank water when it is hot outside. Many tanks are metal or black plastic and the water in them heats quickly during the summer. This may need to be done two or three times a day, as the water becomes hot. Horses will not drink hot water.
- Provide stabled horses plenty of water as well. Most barns don't have automatic waterers in the stalls, so extra buckets (at least two, five gallon buckets) should be hung in each stall. It is very important to dump and refill buckets often—preferably a couple times a day so the water is cool and fresh. This will encourage drinking.

Limited or no access to water is a horse's worst enemy and can lead to heat stress or impaction colic. Make sure your horse has clean, cool water to drink at all times!