

# THE HORSE CARE CORNER

Welcome to the Horse Care Corner, where the staff at Blue Cloud Farms offer helpful hints and savvy advice on caring for your favorite equine.

## Surviving Winter Riding

Living in a cold weather climate can make winter riding, horse care, and training very challenging. Blue Cloud would like to offer a few tips for taking the chill off riding time and how to keep your horse fit through the winter.

### STAYING WARM

**DRESS IN LAYERS:** Wear a light base layer that will keep sweat off your skin, such as silk and polypropylene. Follow that by a layer of wool, cotton or synthetic material that will insulate your body without adding a lot of bulk. Finally, wear a heavy outer layer that is waterproof and will protect you from the wind. Wear well insulated boots but be sure you're able to move them easily in the stirrups. Try foot warmers to ward off cold metacarpals.

**EAT :** Allowing your horse and yourself to eat before riding will warm you up considerably. Eat a meal high in fiber. As the gut digests the fiber in the diet, heat is generated, contributing to the horse's body warmth, even in freezing temperatures.

**GROOMING:** Give yourself time for a good grooming session before you ride. This will warm you up, and will also help wake up and warm your horse's muscles. While grooming, be sure to check your horse's hooves for snow or ice if he's been outdoors. Pick out his feet. Spraying his feet with cooking oil or a coat of Vaseline will help keep the snow from packing in his hooves.

**STRETCH:** Take time to stretch your horse's muscles both on the ground and in the saddle. Cold weather can cause stiffness in joints. This will also help keep you warm by moving around your horse and keeping your heart rate up. Give your horse plenty of time to warm up before you start a strenuous schooling session.

**STAY HYDRATED:** Dehydration during the winter months is easy for both your horse and you and it can make you more susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite. It is known that offering your horse warm water on a cold day will cause him to drink more water thus lowering the risk of colic.

**STAY FOCUSED:** Concentrating on the task at hand will keep your mind off the cold weather. Stay focused on your horse, your goal for the day, and enjoy your horse.

## MAINTAINING A WINTER RIDING PROGRAM

Successful riders should maintain winter riding programs to preserve physical condition and prepare for the coming season which, is really not that far away and will soon be upon you. Keep on a regular riding schedule, even a modified one, as it is important for the physical and mental health of your horse and you. Long periods of time off can cause obstacles in your training program, especially when working with a young horse. Allow four to six hours of riding per week as it will help you keep a leg up on your competition once the show season starts. Here are a few suggestions to help keep you on track.

**Warm-ups.** Cold muscle and joints can be susceptible to injury in both the horse and the rider. Stretching exercises and longer warm-ups are important for maintaining physical condition in cold temperatures, even longer if the horses aren't getting turned out due to weather conditions

**Longeing:** Caution should be taken during lungeing and the horse should be kept under control. Allowing a horse to kick and buck with cold muscles can result in injury and a long recovery.

**Cool Down:** It may be your least favorite part of riding, but it is one of the most important aspects to a good ride and your horse's health. Putting a horse away while he is hot and wet jeopardizes his health by allowing him to catch a chill. Begin your cool down period when you are done with your exercises. Allow the horse to walk for ten to fifteen minutes. Once you remove the saddle, cover the horse with a wool cooler which helps the moisture evaporate faster and keeps the horse safe from drafts. Once the horse is dry and his temperature has returned to normal, you can blanket him if you wish or put him away without a blanket.

**Set goals!** Scheduling regular lessons, clinics, and schooling shows can help keep you focused on riding and staying in the game. When you stay busy and involved, winter vanishes quickly and you and the new competition season will be better prepared.