

## Blankets for Horses: FAQs

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Do you and your horse live in a cold climate? Do rain and snow frequently fall while your horse is turned out to pasture? Does your prize-winning show horse relish a roll in mud and manure - after you've spent countless hours grooming her for the competition lights? Regardless of your situation, blankets may be the answer to many of your troubles. In fact, a suitable horse blanket or sheet may be one of the most important investments you can make when it comes to your horse's health and beauty.

### **Blankets defined**

Horse blankets and sheets are an easy and often economical way to protect your horse from cold, inclement weather, excess dirt, manure, and mud. Some also protect against insects or potentially damaging ultraviolet rays. In addition, frequent grooming removes natural oils from your horse's coat, but blankets and sheets help add a much needed layer of protection regardless of the weather.

Blankets and sheets are available in numerous styles and materials. Generally, a blanket fits over your horse's entire body - covering the withers, back, barrel, and hindquarters - from the shoulder to the tail. The length usually falls around mid-leg. Those with open fronts or shoulder gussets allow your horse more freedom of movement while she is turned out in the pasture or field. Regardless of style, however, a strap around the girth area and rear leg straps will help keep the blanket in position at all times.

The following are some common questions and answers about blanketing your horse:

### **Should I blanket my horse?**

Whether you blanket your horse or not depends greatly on your individual horse and the climate you live in. Here are some instances where a blanket may be beneficial for your horse:

- If your horse is visibly uncomfortable or shivering in the cold weather
- If your horse is older, weak, ill or recovering from an illness
- If your horse is very young
- If your horse is clipped
- If you show your horse
- If your horse does not have a sufficient winter coat
- If your horse was from a warmer climate and is now in a cooler climate

### **When should I begin to blanket my horse?**

As a general rule, you should begin to blanket your horse when you first notice she is uncomfortable in cold weather conditions. Even if your horse is not shivering, you may want to consider blanketing your horse if the wind is brisk or if it is raining or snowing. If the nights are cold but the days are still warm, you may find your horse benefits from having a blanket at night.

### **What type of blanket should I use?**

The best type of blanket depends on your situation. Consider the weather, overall climate in your area, and how your horse

responds to cold, rain, wind, and snow. There are a number of materials available to choose from, including weatherproof nylon, durable canvas, quilted polyester, and polar fleece. A thin sheet is ideal for minimal protection from the sun, or blowing dirt and dust. If your area gets large amounts of cold, rain, or snow, choose a more weather-resistant blanket. You may also want to consider having two blankets on hand so you can wash one blanket while your horse wears the other.

### **Will I be able to tell if my horse is too hot when she is blanketed?**

Your horse may give you physical signs when she is too warm. Sweating behind the ears or along the neck is a telltale sign your horse is too warm wearing his blanket. Be sure to watch for signs your horse is overheating, which include an absence of sweat (anhidrosis) and heavy breathing. Overheating can happen when you blanket your horse when the days are warm, but the nights are still cold and the blanket is not removed early enough in the morning.

### **What is blanket zap? How can I prevent it?**

Blanket zap can be compared to a human getting static shock. Blanket zap is caused when a blanket is taken off your horse, resulting in static electricity which causes stinging static zap to your horse and you. This is particularly common in dry weather or if your horse's hair coat is very dry. To eliminate blanket zap, do NOT slide the blanket across your horse when removing it from her body. Instead, try to remove the blanket by lifting the blanket up and off of your horse's body. If you [curry](#) or [brush](#) your horse more often, your horse's natural oils will be distributed over the hair coat, which also helps to minimize blanket zap.

### **How do I know the blanket fits my horse?**

Blankets are generally made to fit a particular size range. When you purchase a blanket, choose one with a size range in which your horse fits. However, most feature either adjustable or elastic girth, billet, and leg straps that allow the blanket or sheet to fit different body sizes. To ensure the best fit:

1. Measure from the center of your horse's chest around the widest part of the shoulder and hindquarters to the center of the tail. The size to order is the same as the inches measured.
2. For odd sizes, choose the next largest even size.
3. Also round up to the next larger size if your horse has a thick coat or if the blanket or sheet will be used predominately during seasonal weather when your horse's hair coat will grow out.

Remember, slightly looser fitting blankets and sheets are more comfortable and look better than blankets or sheets that are too tight. If in doubt, order one size larger. The best fitting blankets and sheets allow you to slip your hand between the blanket and your horse's withers.

### **What should I do if my horse chews on her blanket?**

Unfortunately, some horses enjoy chewing on blankets and sheets. However, this does not mean that your horse can't wear them. There are horse-safe anti-chew sprays, such as [Chew Stop™](#), available with an unfavorable taste that you can spray directly on the blanket to prevent unwanted chewing. You may also want to consider offering toys or treats such as the [Amazing Graze Treat Dispenser](#), [Uncle Jimmy's Big Licky Holder](#) or the [Jolly Apple](#) to entertain your horse and distract her from chewing.