

What horse feed is made from

Horse feed ingredients are chosen to support equine nutrition in a practical, balanced way. A complete ration is usually built from **forage** as the foundation, with additional **concentrates** or **compound feed** added where more energy, protein, vitamins, or minerals are needed. The exact feed formulation depends on the horse's workload, age, body condition, and digestive needs.

At the most basic level, horse diets are built around roughage such as **grass**, **hay**, and **haylage**. These provide fibre, help with chewing time, and support **gut health**. Many horses can meet much of their daily needs from forage alone, but others need a carefully designed feed to supply extra **digestible energy**, **protein**, or micronutrients.

Concentrates are the more nutrient-dense part of the ration. They are often used when a horse has higher **maintenance requirements**, is in hard work, is growing, or needs help maintaining body condition. A well-made compound feed should complement forage rather than replace it, with an emphasis on digestibility, **fibre content**, and suitable **starch levels**.

Good feeding starts with forage, then fills any nutritional gaps with targeted concentrates.

The main ingredients in horse feed

The best-known cereal ingredients in horse feed are **oats**, **barley**, **maize**, and **wheat bran**. These ingredients are commonly used because they are energy-dense and relatively economical, but they behave differently in the digestive system. Understanding those differences is important when assessing a feed label.

Oats are often considered the most traditional cereal for horses. They are palatable, easy to use, and generally more digestible than some other cereals. Oats provide a useful **energy source**, but they still contribute to the overall **starch** load, so portion size matters. They can suit many horses that need straightforward conditioning without an overly rich diet.

Barley contains more digestible energy than oats on a weight-for-weight basis, but it is usually processed before feeding because whole barley can be less digestible. Rolled or flaked barley is commonly included in **compound feed** for horses needing more fuel. Because of its higher **starch levels**, it must be balanced carefully to avoid excess fermentable carbohydrate in the hindgut.

Maize is another high-energy cereal used in horse feed, valued for its dense calorie content. It can support horses with high energy demands, but like barley, it is typically processed for better digestibility. Maize may be useful for adding condition, yet it should be fed with caution in horses that are sensitive to starch.

Wheat bran is often included to add fibre and texture, but it is not a complete feed on its own. It contributes some **protein** and palatability, although it is lower in energy than cereals like barley or maize. It is sometimes used in mashes or muesli-style feeds, but it should be viewed as one ingredient within a wider nutritional plan rather than a standalone solution.

These cereal ingredients are often combined with other components to produce a balanced ration. The aim is not simply to provide calories, but to deliver digestibility, a suitable energy release profile, and enough micronutrients to support the horse's workload and body condition.

Fibre sources and why they matter

Fibre is central to equine nutrition because horses are designed to process roughage for long periods. Good feed formulation usually includes multiple fibre sources, not just cereals. Common ingredients include **alfalfa**, **beet pulp**, and forage-based materials such as **timothy hay**. These ingredients help increase **digestible fibre** while supporting chewing, saliva production, and **gut health**.

Alfalfa is a highly valued fibre ingredient because it offers both fibre and useful **protein**. It is often included in feeds for horses that need additional condition, better muscle support, or a more sustained energy release. Alfalfa can also improve **palatability**, making it easier to encourage fussy eaters to consume their ration.

Beet pulp is another widely used fibre source. It is highly digestible and can provide excellent **digestible energy** without relying heavily on starch. This makes beet pulp especially useful for horses that need extra calories but do better on a lower-starch diet. Because it supports hindgut fermentation, it is often seen as a valuable ingredient for digestive comfort.

Timothy hay is a popular forage choice in many rations because it tends to be fibre-rich and moderate in energy. As part of the overall forage base, it supports normal chewing behaviour and helps horses maintain a healthier digestive rhythm. When a feed includes timothy-based fibre, it often suits horses that need a controlled energy intake.

Digestible fibre is more than a filler. It acts as an important energy contributor through fermentation in the hindgut, producing a slower and often more stable energy release than cereal starch. This is one reason many modern compound feed products focus on fibre-rich formulations for horses that need steady performance and calmer behaviour.

A fibre-forward ration can be especially valuable for horses with sensitive digestive systems or those that need support for **body condition** without excessive cereal intake. For many horses, the right balance of forage and digestible fibre ingredients is more important than simply increasing the total amount of feed.

Protein, fat and energy ingredients

Horse feed ingredients that support muscle repair, topline, and work capacity often include sources of **protein**, fat, and energy. Among the most common are **soya meal** and **vegetable oil**, both of which play different roles in the ration. A horse feed company uk formulation will often balance these ingredients to suit the intended horse type and workload.

Soya meal is a concentrated source of protein and is frequently used when a feed needs to support growth, muscle development, or tissue repair. It is particularly useful for horses with higher **protein levels** requirements, such as growing horses or those in more demanding training. Protein quality matters, not just quantity, because amino acid balance influences how effectively the horse can use the feed.

Vegetable oil is a common fat source in horse feed. It provides concentrated calories and can increase **digestible energy** without raising starch too much. This is helpful for horses that need extra fuel but benefit from a diet that is less reliant on cereals. Oil can also improve coat condition and support a slower, more sustained energy release during exercise.

Fat and protein are often used strategically together in feed formulation. For example, a performance horse may need extra energy for work, but excessive starch is not always desirable. In that case, a feed may combine digestible fibre, moderate protein, and added oil to provide a more controlled energy profile.

The key is to match the ingredient profile to the horse's current needs. A young horse may need more protein for growth, while a horse in lighter work may need only modest energy support. In both cases, the ration should be

built around the same principle: provide what the horse can use efficiently, while maintaining digestive comfort and nutrient balance.

Vitamins, minerals and supplements

Most modern horse feeds include a carefully designed **vitamin premix** and **mineral premix**. These premixes are important because forage alone may not always provide consistent levels of key nutrients, especially where soil quality, forage type, or storage affects nutrient content. A good feed formulation should support **mineral balance** and **vitamin supplementation** without oversupplying anything unnecessarily.

Among the most important minerals are **calcium** and **phosphorus**. These two work together to support bone structure, muscle function, and many metabolic processes. Their ratio matters as much as their individual levels. If the balance is poor, the diet may not support long-term soundness, especially in growing horses or horses under greater physical demand.

Salt is another essential component. Horses lose sodium and chloride through sweat, so salt helps replace these losses and supports hydration, nerve function, and appetite. Some feeds include salt directly, while others rely on separate access to a salt source. Either way, it is a basic but vital part of a balanced diet.

Vitamin and mineral premixes are especially important when the rest of the diet is based mainly on forage. Hay, haylage, and grass can vary significantly in nutrient content. A feed designed with a proper premix helps close those gaps. This is one of the clearest differences between a simple mix of ingredients and a professionally balanced compound feed.

Supplements should be used with care. More is not automatically better, and the best approach is to look for feeds that already include the right nutrient profile rather than layering multiple products without checking overlap. A sensible feeding plan considers the whole ration, not just one bag on its own.

Additives, binders and palatability agents

Some horse feeds include ingredients that improve texture, consistency, shelf life, or acceptance. Common examples include **molasses**, **binders**, and other **feed additives**. These ingredients do not usually provide the main nutritional structure of the feed, but they can affect how the feed looks, tastes, and performs in storage and feeding.

Molasses is often added to improve **palatability** and help dusty ingredients stick together. It can make a feed more appealing, especially for horses that are fussy or reluctant to eat. However, molasses also contributes sugars, so it should be considered as part of the overall carbohydrate profile rather than ignored as a minor detail.

Binders help the feed hold its shape, reduce crumbly texture, and support manufacturing consistency. They are especially useful in pellets or cubes, where uniform size and hardness matter. In practical terms, binders help ensure each mouthful contains a similar nutrient profile, which supports more even intake.

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Feed additives can include a wide range of substances, from flavouring agents to ingredients aimed at supporting digestion or product stability. When evaluating additives, it is important to focus on the full **feed**

label and the role each component plays. Some additives mainly improve handling and taste, while others are included for nutritional or technological reasons.

Not all horses need highly palatable feeds, but many benefit from an ingredient profile that encourages consistent intake. The challenge is to balance appeal with nutritional control, particularly where starch, sugar, and overall energy intake must be *low-sugar horse feed* managed carefully.

How to read a horse feed label

A clear **feed label** is one of the best tools for choosing the right product. The first thing to check is the **composition**, which lists the ingredients used in the feed. This tells you whether the ration is based mainly on cereals, fibre, oil, or a blend of ingredients. The ingredient list also helps you see whether the feed is a cereal-based mix, a fibre-based pellet, or a more specialised **compound feed**.

Next, look at the **analytical constituents**. This section provides the guaranteed analysis, often including crude protein, oil, fibre, ash, and sometimes starch or sugar values. It gives a snapshot of the feed's nutritional profile, helping you compare products more objectively. If you are choosing between feeds, this section is often more useful than front-of-pack claims.

When reading the analytical values, consider how they fit the horse's needs. A horse needing weight gain may need a higher energy feed with more oil or digestible fibre. A horse that is sharp or prone to digestive upset may need lower starch levels. A horse needing muscle support may benefit from higher protein levels, provided the rest of the ration is balanced.

The **feeding instructions** are equally important. They show how much feed should be given relative to bodyweight, **overweight horse feed** work level, or forage intake. Good instructions help you avoid underfeeding or overfeeding and make it easier to keep the ration aligned with **body condition**, workload, and digestive tolerance.

Always read the label as a whole. One ingredient rarely tells the full story. A balanced assessment considers the complete composition, the analytical constituents, and how the feed fits alongside forage, turnout, and exercise.

How horse feed company UK formulations vary by horse type

A **horse feed company uk** will usually formulate feeds with different horse profiles in mind, because one ration does not suit every animal. The right mix of ingredients depends on whether the horse is in light work, hard work, growing, or maintaining condition. Feed formulation also needs to account for digestive sensitivity, temperament, and the amount of forage already being eaten.

Maintenance feed is typically designed for horses with modest energy demands. It often focuses on fibre, moderate protein, and balanced vitamins and minerals rather than high cereal content. This type of ration supports condition and health without providing unnecessary calories. For horses that live mostly on forage, a maintenance feed may simply top up missing micronutrients.

A **performance horse** usually needs more digestible energy, and that energy may come from a mix of cereals, fibre, and oil. These feeds are formulated to support work output while controlling starch levels where possible. Performance diets often place greater emphasis on digestibility, palatability, and stable energy release so the horse can work efficiently.

A **young horse** has different needs again. Growth requires careful attention to protein, calcium, phosphorus, and overall mineral balance. The feed should support skeletal development and muscle growth without overloading

the digestive system. For younger horses, the quality of protein and the consistency of vitamin and mineral supply are especially important.

Across all horse types, the core principle is the same: the ration should complement forage, not replace it. Whether the feed is designed for a pony at grass or a horse in training, the best formulations support a balanced diet with controlled energy, appropriate nutrients, and enough fibre to support long-term gut function.

In practice, a horse feed company uk develops products by combining ingredient selection with practical feeding goals. That may mean a high-fibre mix for calm energy, a cereal-based feed for rapid calorie supply, or a low-starch option for horses that need digestive support. Matching the product to the horse type is the difference between a generic feed and a genuinely useful ration.

Frequently asked questions about horse feed ingredients

What are the main ingredients in horse feed?

The main ingredients in horse feed usually include forage-based components such as grass, hay, and haylage, plus concentrates like oats, barley, maize, wheat bran, alfalfa, beet pulp, soya meal, and vegetable oil. Most feeds also contain vitamin premix, mineral premix, salt, and sometimes molasses, binders, or other feed additives. The exact mix depends on whether the feed is intended for maintenance, performance, or growth.

Is forage the most important part of a horse's diet?

Yes. Forage is usually the foundation of a balanced diet because it supports chewing, digestion, and gut health. Grass, hay, and haylage provide roughage and digestible fibre, which are central to equine nutrition. Concentrates are added to supply extra energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals where needed, but they should not displace forage unless a qualified feeding plan says otherwise.

Why do some horse feeds contain molasses or oil?

Molasses is often used to improve palatability and reduce dust, while vegetable oil is used to increase digestible energy without adding much starch. Both ingredients can improve the practicality of a feed, but they serve different purposes. Molasses can make a feed more appealing, while oil is a concentrated energy source that is often useful for performance horses or horses needing condition.

How can I tell if a horse feed is high in starch?

Check the ingredient list and the analytical constituents on the feed label. Feeds with lots of oats, barley, or maize are usually higher in starch, especially if they contain little fibre or oil. If starch is listed in the analysis, compare the value between products. A feed with more beet pulp, alfalfa, and vegetable oil, and less cereal, is often better suited to horses that need lower starch levels.

What ingredients should I look for in feed for different types of horses?

For a maintenance feed, look for good forage support, digestible fibre, and a sensible vitamin and mineral premix. For a performance horse, look for digestible energy from a mix of fibre, oil, and carefully managed cereals, along with adequate protein. For a young horse, focus on balanced calcium, phosphorus, quality protein, and a reliable mineral balance. In all cases, the best feed is the one that complements forage and matches the horse's workload, age, body condition, and digestive needs.