

HORSE CARE: MYTHS & TIPS

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World-class groom and braider, Ruthann Smith, reveals the often-surprising truth behind what you think you know about horsemanship. Her handy tips are based on the best of old school and new knowledge. Every month, she reveals routines of the most brilliant and seasoned grooms, making it easier to take better care of your horses, pocket, and earth.

Bedding Statistics Perpetuate Myths

These green-conscious times are bringing forth new information, but heads up. Some claim pellets and mats save on bedding. That may be true, but there are other important issues to consider in order to fully understand the impact of your choices on not only the environment but also horses' soundness. This article will consider hidden costs, with the ideal being to go green and be the most cost-effective.

I watched horses sleep, as well as studied and conferred with world-class grooms for 30+ years, often 18 hours a day, from atop a ladder. I could see many horses in their stalls at any time. Teaching Top Turnout™ Clinics, I travel to farms around the continent and have witnessed care patterns inconsistent with established truths.

If you want to conserve resources, reduce waste, lower vet bills, perform less work, and enjoy horses with bigger hearts, please consider this:

- **Mats can be dangerous without enough bedding.** With most mats, horses slip getting up. Serious injuries can occur. Choose mats carefully.

- **Bedding lightly with pellets is not a viable substitute for bedding well.** Wet or not, bedding less does not necessarily save. To greatly reduce bedding costs and disposal: bed deep and pick stalls often. It will save on time, too.

- **Bedding can promote soundness.** Horses love deep fluffy beds. It is better for circulations. Plus, they can rest their bones instead of becoming stiff. Banked deep is generally considered best. They love a pillow.

- **Dry sleep is better.** Sleeping in a damp stall promotes soreness and achiness. If a horse wets a lot, take it out before bedtime, and fluff the stall to reestablish an even bed with banks.

- **Read your bedding.** Always look at the bedding to make sure your horse is not getting sick.

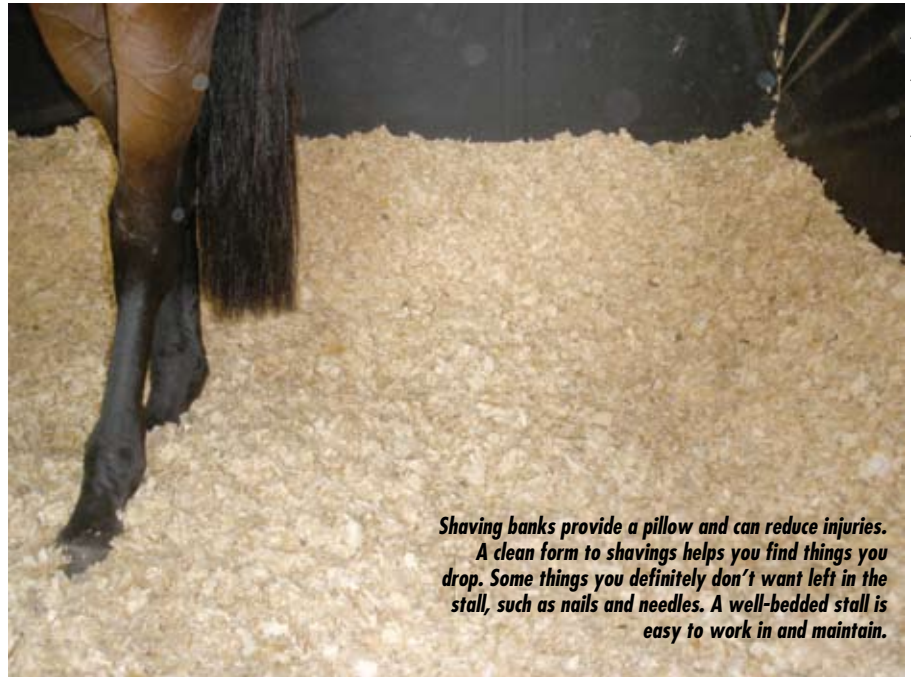


Photo: LuckyBraids.com

Shaving banks provide a pillow and can reduce injuries. A clean form to shavings helps you find things you drop. Some things you definitely don't want left in the stall, such as nails and needles. A well-bedded stall is easy to work in and maintain.

Holes: Digging can indicate discomfort that can quickly lead to colic. And, while banks can reduce the number of horses that get cast, if a horse paws a gulley, it is apt to get stuck or cast.

Circling: Stall walking can also indicate discomfort.

Manure: Always note a stall's condition as you enter it. If a horse has not been passing enough manure, he is



Ruthann Smith's mission is to raise the bar of horsemanship by making it easier to take better care of horses.

Said to braid luck into manes, Ruthann developed the award-winning Lucky Braids™ grooming products because she knows sending winners to the ring is more than looking great. It is about sending levelheaded, confident horses that can focus and have big hearts to win.

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MYTHS & TIPS

getting or is already sick. Make sure he is drinking and take him for a walk. Consult with your trainer or veterinarian.

Bedding for Big Hearts and a Green Earth

Here are tips for greatly-reduced bedding costs and disposal.

Skip Out: Pick stalls several times during the day – the more often, the better. It's easier! The stalls never get dirty. No work and much less removal.

Co-op: If everyone picks another's stall, the shavings never get dirty. With most horses, you only need to take out the wet in the morning.

Clean Best: In my experience, proper process can reduce waste and maintain fluffy, fresh shavings, while only taking out half a small wheelbarrow in the morning and a few dumps without bedding throughout the day and before bed. I see that as the best way to save on shavings: never let them get dirty. The misconception is that this requires more work. It's less! This is especially true if the horses are handled well. They should be in a routine to stand to the side of the stall as you pick.

Take Less: Only take out dirty shavings. Separate manure buns by sifting off shavings with the fork. Turn bedding daily by throwing it against the wall. Manure separates itself out as it rolls off the bank. Then, spread and bank the shavings.

Use Less: If you bed light, you need to rebed daily. If you bed deep pick often (3 to 8 times daily), remove only dirty shavings and all manure, you only need to add a bag per stall per week. I like 10 bags in a standard stall.

Win More: Picking saves shavings and allows for your horse to love his life. Nothing like a good night's sleep! Especially when he is not stiff!

Imagine it; the big body is pressing on the ground. Without enough bedding, circulation is inhibited. Tired and sore parts are not replenished. Lactic acid stays in the muscle. Horses get sore – similar to when blankets don't fit. When they are tight in the shoulders, it makes horses stiff. If they can't get comfortable or move, they get sore – disagreeable, even.

Pick lots! You'll love the results. It only takes a minute. Save, conserve and reduce. In my experience, for the average barn, bedding well could reduce needs by 70% to 90%, and even make horses' hearts big! So, bed to win. ■

This is not a stallion.

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