



- News, views and insights that matter to breeders, owners and racing industry professionals - May 2026 -

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Rutgers Equine Science Center's Equine Pasture Management: "A Year-Round Approach"

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Reviewed by Carey Williams, Ph.D., Extension Specialist in Equine Management*

Introduction

Pasture management is an evolving dynamic system requiring care and supervision year-round. Equine practitioners often expect their pastures to provide areas for exercise, training, and forage production, without providing adequate levels of plant management to obtain these goals and expectations. Pasture management is not a one-shot deal, but should be regarded as a system in constant fluctuation. Equine practitioners need to assess pasture management much as they do horse management, relationship to nutrition, grooming, eventing, breed selection, health care, rest/recuperation, and overall general equine common sense.

Nutrition

Pastures, much like horses, need a balanced diet if they are to attain optimal growth and performance. Unfortunately though, pastures quite often are left to fend for themselves until such time as they either become an eyesore or have little or no stand utility. When meeting their horses' nutritional demands, producers go all out in balancing horses' diets by using prescribed rations and feeds. Reaching the same level of management for the pasture should be a goal of equine practitioners.

To achieve the same level for their pastures, growers need to begin by taking a soil test

at least every other year, if not every year, to monitor nutritional needs. Nutrition requirements for pH and plant growth are essential if optimal growth and performance are desired. Much like the ration for a horse, a balanced diet for pastures goes very far in assisting in overall performance and forage production.

Pastures with an average pH of 6.5 (or a range of 6.0-7.0) will allow for maximum nutrient utilization for optimal pasture growth and production. Fertilize pastures according to the seasons and expected performance demands. Apply fertilizer based upon soil test results to maximize pasture potentials. Applications split throughout the pasture season encourage initial spring growth, regenerative summer growth, and, most important, fall root strengthening and subsequent winter protection.

Grooming

Grooming pastures is another essential criterion of successful pasture management and subsequent plant and forage growth. Once pastures are grazed to adequate levels (3-4 inches), remove horses and then clip or mow, simultaneously drag, and fertilize. The mowing will cut off uneaten vegetation (forages and weeds) and will be extremely beneficial for regenerating new plant growth. This new growth will be more palatable and nutritious for successive pasturing in an applied rotation practice. Dragging pastures with commercial



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tine or chain drags or even with home-made drag designs, will help break up manure deposits and aerate the sod or thatch cover.

Depending on each grower's situation, the rotation of use should be done on a four- to five-week schedule. The size of the pasture and the related stocking needs will determine the rotational schedule in conjunction with weather conditions, nutrient practices, and the pasture quality.

Stocking rates will have a tremendous impact on pastures, as will the eventing use of that pasture. One horse per acre should be a common goal for pasturing success in much of New Jersey. When combined with larger equine numbers, intensive grazing of one or more horses per acre can be achieved in an integrated pasture-rotation system. If the pasture is used for other reasons, i.e., turnout, exercise, and for various eventing/training, the relative success of the pasture will be impeded accordingly.

Seed Variety

Pasture forage species and blend selections should be analyzed, much like matching equine breeds to the task or

specific job you want the horse to do. You wouldn't generally pick a Standardbred for dressage, so in parallel you would not plant alfalfa in high-traffic exercise paddocks. For general purposes it is best to select a mix of grasses and legumes that provide pasturing needs throughout the growing season.

Cool-season species, such as timothy, perennial ryegrass, bromegrass, bluegrass, reed canary grass and orchard grass, provide early grazing in spring and early summer. They will also provide grazing when cooler temperatures arrive in fall. These grasses perform adequately when managed properly and provide partial pasture during the summer months. Cool-season grasses in our area generally flower or bloom by mid-May and continue into early June. At this time they tend to mature and go to seed, producing coarse stalky forage that horses generally will not eat. Mowing at this time is critical, but generally should be done before the plants reach this stage of maturity.

Warm-season species will continue to grow and bloom during the hotter, drier summer months if properly grazed,

fertilized and clipped. Within this grouping are legumes (clovers, trefoils, and vetches) that mature with the cool-season varieties, but offer continued regrowth during summer and into early fall under proper management.

Rest-Rotation-Recuperation

Pastures, not unlike horses, need rest and recuperation if they are to maximize production goals. Rest for a pasture will reduce the stress from equine traffic and allow the forages to recuperate and establish new growth.

Rotational goals should allow plants to reestablish new leaf growth for photosynthesis. Without rest the pasture's regenerative process will not respond well to fertilization and water efficiently.

Proper pasture health care, not unlike equine health care, is essential for maximum production. Pastures may also need insect, disease, and/or weed controls based on diagnosis by a specialist. If left untreated, infested pastures will be less productive and possibly may even die out. The higher the stress factor placed upon the pasture, the greater the chance for poor performance and production.

Rutgers Equine Science Center reminds you to check your pastures for poisonous plants

There's hope that spring is right around the corner! Maybe it's wishful thinking, but horses are shedding out their winter coats which means the days are getting longer. Spring will bring fresh green grass along with it. Lurking among these juicy shoots may be some plants that are harmful to your horse. It's never a bad idea to review poisonous plants and check your pasture for them.

Good pasture management is one of your best defenses against those lurking plants. Despite all your best efforts, you might still end up with some unwanted plants in your pasture. Because of this, it

can be a good idea to take a walk through your pasture to check for these plants.

There are some plants that only grow in certain regions of the world. Because of this you'll want to be familiar with and find resources that are specific to your geographic location to help you in identifying any potentially dangerous plants in your pasture.

After doing some browsing through extension publications it looks like there are some plants that are fairly common across a number of geographic locations, especially within the United States.

There's not just one substance that makes a plant poisonous. There are a number of different chemical compounds that make plants toxic to animals. For an example, a class of compounds called alkaloids are what makes plants in the nightshade family toxic, while its glycosides that make wild cherries toxic.

The symptoms associated with poisoning vary because there are so many different compounds which could be causing the problem. These symptoms can range all the way from mild irritation or sickness to death. The symptoms and severity of the symptoms are also



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dependent on how much of the plant an animal consumed and what part of the plant the animal consumed. Some plants concentrate the poisonous compounds in their seeds while other will have higher concentrations in their leaves or stems.

If you suspect your horse has eaten a poisonous plant, you need to contact your veterinarian immediately. They will be able to provide supportive care

and recommend the best course of action. You should also save the plant that you think your horse nibbled on as this can be used in helping to diagnose the problem. Don't forget that these poisonous plants can also be found in your horse's hay. If you're not finding anything in the pasture, you may want to take a look at the hay.

The next time you're out walking through the pasture to fetch your horse, take a few minutes to notice the plants growing under your feet. It's also a good idea to routinely walk your pasture with the purpose of checking for poisonous plants. You'll want to be sure you check those fence lines as well! There are plenty of plants that like to lurk along the edges of the pasture and escape your notice.

2026 New Jersey-bred stakes schedule at Monmouth Park

Run Date	Stakes Name	Purse	Division	Distance
June 6	Spruce Fir Handicap	\$75,000	F & M, 3 and up	6 furlongs
June 7	John J. Reilly Handicap	\$75,000	3 and up	6 furlongs
June 27	Jersey Girl Handicap	\$75,000	F & M, 3 and up	1 mile (Turf)
July 4	Irish War Cry Handicap	\$75,000	3 and up	1 mile (Turf)
August 23	Charles Hesse III Handicap	\$100,000	3 and up	1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles
August 23	NJ Breeders Handicap	\$75,000	3 and up	6 furlongs
August 23	Eleven North Handicap	\$75,000	F & M, 3 and up	6 furlongs

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MSW Fillies, Two-year-Olds: July 3, 26, August 23, September 12
MSW Boys, Two-year-Olds: June 14, July 5, 31, August 23, September 13
MSW F&M Short Dirt: May 16, June 26, August 23
MSW Boys Short Dirt: May 17, June 28, August 23
MSW F&M Long Dirt: August 9
MSW Boys Long Dirt: August 14
MSW F&M Short Turf: August 16
MSW Boys Short Turf: August 22
MSW F&M Long Turf: May 23, August 23
MSW Boys Long Turf: May 24, August 23
\$100K NW2L Girls Short Dirt: May 25, August 15
\$100K NW2L Boys Short Dirt: May 30, August 21
\$150K NW3L Girls Short Dirt: July 10, August 30
\$150K NW3L Boys Short Dirt: July 17, September 5
\$150K NW3L Girls Long Dirt: August 7
\$150K NW3L Boys Long Dirt: August 8
ALW NW1X or NW2 Girls Short Dirt: May 10
ALW NW1X or NW2 Boys Short Dirt: May 9
ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Girls Short Dirt: July 19, August 23

ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Boys Short Dirt: July 18, August 23
ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Girls Long Dirt: May 31, August 23
ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Boys Long Dirt: June 13, August 23
ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Girls Short Turf: June 20, August 1, August 23
ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Boys Short Turf: June 21, August 2, August 23
ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Girls Long Turf: July 11, August 23, September 6
ALW NW1X or \$15,000 Boys Long Turf: July 12, August 23, September 7
ALW NW2X or \$30,000 Girls Short Dirt: July 24
ALW NW2X or \$30,000 Boys Short Dirt: July 25
ALW NW2X or \$30,000 Girls Long Turf: August 28
ALW NW2X or \$30,000 Boys Long Turf: August 29
Stakes Girls Short Dirt: June 6, August 23
Stakes Boys Short Dirt: June 7, August 23
Stakes Girls Long Turf: June 27
Stakes Boys Long Turf: July 4
Stakes Boys Long Dirt: August 23



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Membership Application

Member Information

NAME _____

SS#/FEDERAL I.D.# _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

COUNTY _____

TELEPHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

Membership Categories

Breeder

A breeder member shall be a person who owns the required interest in a broodmare or registered stallion domiciled in New Jersey; who submits an application for membership, and pays the membership dues. A breeder member shall have voting rights.

Owner

An owner member shall be a person who owns a registered New Jersey- bred; who submits an application for membership, and pays the membership dues. An owner member will not have voting rights.

Associate

An associate member is a person who is interested in owning, breeding, or racing horses in the State of New Jersey or in fostering economic activity through the breeding, ownership and/or racing of horses in the State of New Jersey. An associate member will not have voting rights.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Membership Dues

A check or money order for \$100.00 must accompany this form. Spouses are encouraged to join the **TBANJ** under joint membership status. This fee would total \$150.00 per couple. Each spouse must fill out a separate form to accompany the payment. Membership will be effective upon receipt and will be in force each calendar year and must be renewed annually.

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