

Haylage for horses – The natural forage solution

Baled haylage provides hygienic forage with a high feed value. This information folder explains what haylage is and the benefits gained from feeding high quality forage to your horse or pony.



The benefits of baled haylage

Feeding baled haylage is a superior forage solution with substantial benefits for most horse owners.

Compared with hay, haylage is a dust-free alternative that can help prevent horses developing respiratory problems and also help to alleviate coughing symptoms in horses sensitive to dust.

Correctly produced haylage is very palatable, a benefit for many high performance horses, that often have reduced appetites.

Unlike hay, haylage is not dependent on good weather for long harvesting periods; a couple of days of sunshine will be enough.

Haylage bales do not have to be stored indoors and are not sensitive to moisture during storage.

In bigger stables with more horses, big bale haylage allows rational forage handling and is economically favourable compared with hay feeding.

Baled haylage is natural forage. The nutritive value of the forage will vary with the date of harvest and the DM (dry matter) content enabling possibilities to produce forage suitable for all types of horses and ponies.

Haylage is a beneficial forage solution for horses and is becoming increasingly popular. This is why Trioplast, in collaboration with SLU (the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences), have produced this information leaflet. It explains the basic principles of haylage production and provides some simple advice on handling haylage.

Wholesome and healthy for the horses

The horse is foremost a grass-eating animal and therefore needs some form of grass in the ration at all times. In the summer, the grass usually comes from grazing, but during the winter the horse needs some form of conserved grass product that suits its requirements. Previously the usual way of conserving grass for horses has been to dry it into hay. In years with good harvesting weather and a cold, dry autumn, the chances of dust-free hay with a high nutritional value and high hygienic quality are good. Unfortunately, we are not able to guarantee good harvesting weather. Rain during harvest leads to a delay in haymaking and ultimately produces hay with low nutritional value and poor hygienic quality. Dusty and mouldy hay is a direct health hazard to both people and horses. Horses can easily develop hypersensitivity to dust, leading to chronic coughs and reduced performance. Haylage is a tested alternative to hay. Haylage with DM content around 50% is both nutritious and palatable.

The process of silage making, 3 000 year old news

Around 3 000 years ago in Egypt, a simple form of ensiling was used, for example enclosing forage in airtight silos, today this technique has been refined. When carried out correctly, baled haylage provides easy-to-handle forage with a high nutritional value and good hygienic qualities. Trioplast has developed a stretch film that is specially adapted for horse forage, Trioplast HorseWrap®.

How does baled haylage work?

Wrapping a bale creates a small silo. This action can be compared with a normal preserving jar. Well-preserved haylage maintains the nutritional content of the grass whilst achieving a good hygienic quality.

How to choose the right forage

Whether you produce the forage yourself or buy it, the most important factor is the hygienic quality. Haylage must be free from harmful bacteria and fungi. The simplest way to evaluate haylage is to smell it and look at its colour. It should be green to brown-greenish and smell fresh. If you are unsure about the hygienic quality of the forage you can take a sample and have a hygienic analysis carried out. Remember also to choose a bale size that is suitable for the number of horses you have. Do not expect it to last for more than three days in spring and autumn, even if the haylage stays fresh for longer during the cold winter months. Nutritionally, you should try to find forage that is suitable for the category of horse you have. Brood mares and growing young horses need more protein, whilst sports and competition horses need more energy than leisure horses.

How much haylage does the horse need?

As a ground rule, a horse should have at least 1,5 kg of roughage DM per 100 kg of body weight per day, and given the opportunity to seek

for feed at least 8 h per day. So for a horse weighing 500 kg this means that regardless of whether the horse is given hay, haylage or both, the minimum ration of roughage should be 7,5 kg DM per day. If the haylage contains 55% DM per 1 kg the horse would need 7,5 kg DM which would equal a total weight of a minimum 13,6 kg fresh haylage. Should the horse alternatively be fed hay with a DM content of approx. 84% per 1 kg then a minimum of 9 kg hay should be fed every day in order to maintain good function and satisfy the horses desire to chew. As haylage is a wetter product than hay it will weigh more but the volumes of haylage to be fed will be less.

Storage and handling

The bales should preferably be stored under cover. To stop birds and rodents attacking the bales, they should be placed as far away from trees and bushes as possible. Bales should not be placed on grass or on a damp base either, but on a bed of sand. Round bales should be placed upright and can be stacked vertically on top of each other. Square bales can sometimes develop a concave side; this side should face down when stacking to avoid an accumulation of water. Even though bales wrapped in Trioplast HorseWrap® are durable, they should always be handled with care. A wrapped bale that has been damaged should be repaired immediately and in preference used as soon as possible. If the packaging has been damaged for a long time without being repaired, the bale should be discarded. The film is stabilised against UV deterioration for up to 12 months.



To think about!

Some points to note when handling haylage:

The forage must not smell of ammonia or butyric acid, if they do, such bales should not be fed. The forage should be green to brown-greenish in colour with real grass structure and fresh smell; it must not be stuck together or slimy. Mouldy haylage should not be fed.

Small white dots on the surface of the haylage are usually yeast. Yeast is not harmful in any way.

Remember that the DM content can vary between bales. A horse needs more volume of a wetter haylage than it does of a drier one, as the water content is higher and the nutritional content lower per kg of forage. If you are unsure of the DM content, you can easily determine the DM yourself.

Why not ask your forage producer for a nutritional analysis of the haylage? Samples are easily taken and provide the best results in connection with baling.

Ask for bales wrapped in Trioplast HorseWrap® when buying haylage for your horses.



HORSEWRAP®

WHEN ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH

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HorseWrap is developed in cooperation with SLU

