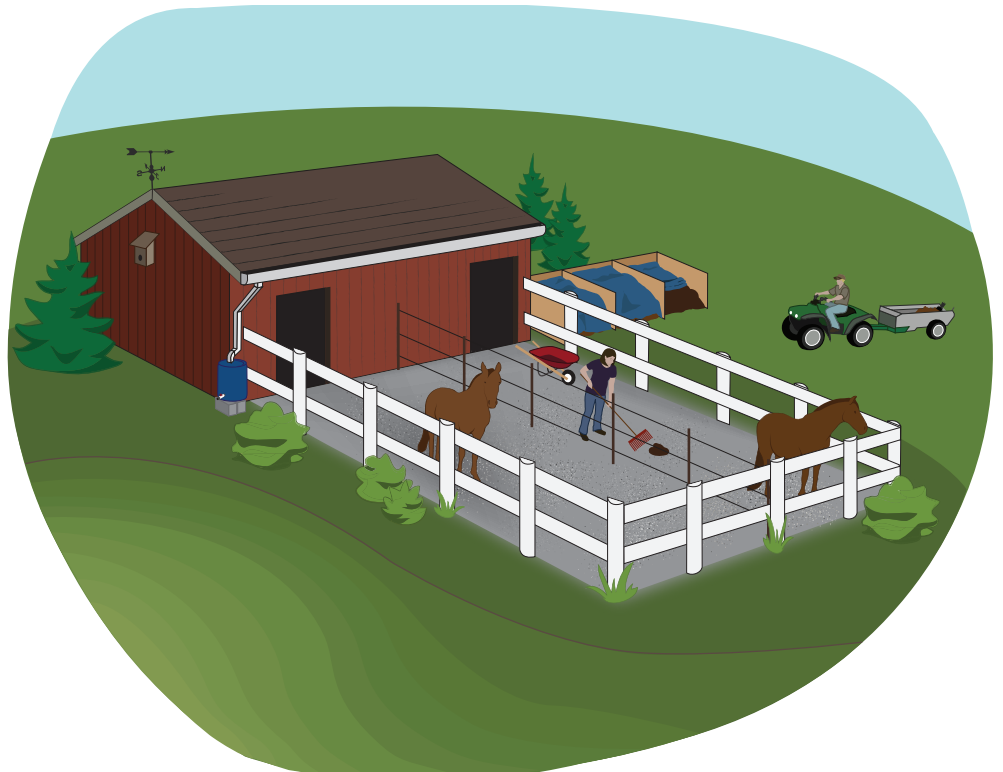


Confinement Areas for Horses

One of the most important aspects of pasture management is the length of time you keep horses off the pasture. When horses are allowed year round access to pastures, grass plants can become overgrazed, making them dramatically less productive and allowing weeds to take over in their place. Grazing during the winter months is especially hard on pastures. When soils are wet they are easily compacted, suffocating the roots of grass plants and doing long-term damage to vital air and water channels in the soil. Consider adding a confinement area to your grazing system or farm.



A confinement area is a place where your horse can be outside without negatively impacting pastures. Confinement areas (sometimes referred to as heavy use areas, sacrifice areas or winter paddocks) can be used for different purposes, depending on the time of year:

Late fall through early spring. Horses should be kept in confinement areas throughout the rainiest months (generally October-March).

Spring, summer and early fall. Horses should be kept in confinement areas during the growing season, whenever grass is three inches or less in height. Horses can be put back on pastures when the grass has regrown to about six to eight inches.

Here are some things to keep in mind when building a confinement area:

□ **Location, location, location.** Choose a well-drained area away from streams ponds, swales, wetlands or other sources of clean water. Ideally, you'll want a location on higher ground or graded to a slight slope (about 1-2%) in order to help water drain away from your barns and confinement areas. Keep chore-efficiency in mind: try to locate your confinement area near stalls, feeding areas and manure storage.

□ **Collect manure daily** or at least every three days. Cleaning manure out of confinement areas every one to three days is the simplest and most important thing you can do to prevent mud. Most livestock manure contains 70-80 percent moisture. If manure is left to be trampled into the soil by livestock, it will quickly turn to mud. Cleaning manure from confinement areas also helps prevent parasite reinfestation.

□ **Install gutters and downspouts.** Another key to mud prevention is to use gutters and downspouts to divert clean rain water away from animal confinement areas, stall entry-ways and other high traffic areas. Ideally the outlet for the gutters will be in a well vegetated area that does not receive a lot of use, such as an unused section of pasture. Clean water can also be diverted to stock watering tanks, rain barrels or dry wells. Note: Be sure to protect downspouts from horses!

□ **Footing.** A layer of gravel (5/8" minus), hogfuel or sand will also help keep confinement areas from getting muddy. The best footing choice for your situation may depend on a number of different factors such as soil type, the size of your area and animal needs. For help choosing the best option for you, contact your local Conservation District.

□ **Sizing considerations.** A confinement area should be large enough for movement and comfort but small enough to easily clean up manure. For horses, 750 to 1,000 square feet per animal is a good rule of thumb. Hot horses should have long and narrow areas such as 20 feet wide by 100 feet long. Keep in mind that horses may need to be in separate areas. There are many new, innovative designs for paddock areas that encourage movement and reduce boredom. For more information, check out the Track Paddock fact sheet at www.betterground.org/track-paddocks/.

□ **Fencing and safety tips.** When building your confinement area, size gates for trucks, tractors or other equipment that may need access. Select your fencing with safety in mind. Whatever type of fencing you choose, you may want to reinforce it with hot wire to protect both your horses and the fence. Electric wire is generally inexpensive, low maintenance and provides the most flexibility if you choose to adjust the size of the area later on. Finally, do a safety check in your confinement area and remove any protruding nails, bolts or loose wire. If you've used metal T-posts, you may want to use caps and cover them with some kind of protective sheath.

□ **Filter Runoff.** As rainfall travels through confinement areas, it will often pick up sediment from bare soil and bacteria and nutrients from manure. Surrounding your confinement area with grass or other plants will help filter out these contaminants before they have a chance to reach nearby streams, lakes or rivers.

□ **Provide adequate outdoor lighting.** Keep in mind that you may often need to clean manure or care for horses at night or during the winter months when it gets dark early. Good lighting will make it easier for you to clean up manure on a daily basis and keep your confinement area mud-free!



Questions?

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**Back page photo by Alayne Blickle, Horses for Clean Water*