

## Herbs for the Elderly Horse

During the “golden years” the process of ageing means that there will gradually be a slowing down and less effective bodily function and capacity. Supportive herbs can really help to slow down the process of ageing, helping to keep your older horses healthy and sprightly.

I've listed below in preferential order the herbs I would choose for an elderly horse. If you would like to give your aged horse some herbal support then choose at least one herb from each category and blend them together. Feed about 40g daily to a horse (25g for a pony) of the blend, and it shouldn't be too long before you see the difference!

**Category 1) Circulatory stimulants.** These herbs will help to encourage blood flow right through to the extremities. They are a wonderful overall support of efficient bodily function, and will really help to relieve conditions like arthritis and encourage hair and hoof growth by increasing blood flow at the hair follicles, corium and deep into the joints. Efficient circulation will also assist with thermo-regulation. My favorites in this category are Nettle (which is a particularly good blood cleanser, stimulant and hair tonic) and Hawthorn (the best herbal cardiac tonic and rich in healthy bioflavenoids).

**Category 2) Digestive Support.** Even with regular expert dental care (which they should all have) the older horse may still have trouble digesting his food correctly, and this can create all sorts of related problems, including laminitis. There are many herbs that could fall within this category's description but for the purpose of assisting elderly horses in general I've created two sub-categories (S-C) in this group. When making a blend be sure to pick one herb from each sub-category. **S-C (i) Bitters.** These herbs support the liver and stimulate enzyme production and bile flow so are great digestive stimulants. The first pick should be Devil's Claw, as it is also an excellent anti-inflammatory, so will also help reduce stiffness throughout the body. Burdock root is also a bitters. **S-C (ii) Demulcents.** These herbs soothe and protect the gastric lining thus encouraging efficient assimilation. They are usually also very nutritive. Pick number one for me is Fenugreek seed which will also increase the appetite and is a good source of vitamin E; other good choices would be Slippery Elm bark powder, Licorice root and Comfrey leaf (which is also a good source of vitamin B12).

**Category 3) General Health Maintenance.** These herbs are healthy for any horse on a regular basis; elderly horses are certainly no exception! Rosehips are a great tonic particularly as a rich source of copper, vitamin C and bioflavenoids. Garlic and Green Pumpkin seed are traditionally used to reduce worm burdens in the gut, and Garlic is also well known for its use as an immune support. Kelp is

very nourishing and contains a wealth of easily assimilable minerals, vitamins and amino-acids.

**Category 4) Diuretics.** These herbs assist the kidneys and increase the flow of urine, thus helping to remove toxins from the body and encouraging regular water intake. They work well in combination with the bitters herbs in order to cleanse the body and restore proper function. Dandelion is the best choice as it helps to replace the potassium, sodium and silica levels that would otherwise be leached out of the body (medical diuretics do not, hence they can cause kidney damage). A combination of celery seed with equal proportions of juniper berries is also a balanced natural diuretic.

You will find that a combination of herbs from these categories, all working synergistically together, will definitely help your aged horse to attain greater mobility, improve disease resistance and maintain healthy weight condition. Aged horses should still have the dignity of a glossy coat, bright eyes and a spring to their step!