

## **Herbology for Horses – an Introduction:**

Herbalism is the use of plants for healing purposes and for the maintenance of good health. Herbal medicine has been documented throughout the ages, predating 5000BC, whereas modern scientific medicine has been in existence for scarcely a mere 100 years!!! Herbal medicine was initially shunned by western scientific medicine, but as scientific knowledge is expanding, more and more substantiation and understanding is coming out as to how and why plants and their incredible constituents are so essential to good health. Nowadays it almost seems as though modern science is playing catch up with ancient knowledge!

In herbal medicine, single herbs can be used to specifically treat symptoms, which will give short-term relief, but an effective herbal blend will treat the underlying causes as well, which will balance the overall health of the individual to the point where the condition should not reoccur, and in general the individual's disease resistance should also be far greater. Of course, this is assuming that a healthy natural diet and a correct environment for basic physiological needs are also simultaneously maintained.

Horses in the wild are natural herbalists – they are able to seek out and browse on a variety of medicinal and nutrient rich plants if and when needed. By domesticating horses, we have largely taken this away from them. The absolute ideal would be to allow every horse free choice of all types of herbs he/she may possibly need at any given, but this would be highly impractical, so the next best thing, in my opinion, is to regularly supplement herbs that we know are beneficial for horses in maintaining good health, and then treating with medicinal herbs and/or allopathic medicine if or when the need arises.

Registered (check on the label!) commercially available herbal blends are generally safe if fed at recommended dosages. Remember that if you are feeding more than one herbal blend simultaneously, halve the recommended dosage of each. For horses, when feeding a single herb in dried form, a generally safe dose would be about 15g. However, it is always recommended to check each individual herb's specific dosage rate, especially if you are planning to supplement it long-term. When feeding a blend of dried herbs, a maximum dose of 30-50g is sufficient for a horse. Dosage should be halved for ponies.

If feeding herbs for general health maintenance consistently over an extended period of time, then a good rule of feeding herbs, to maintain optimum efficacy, is two months on and two weeks off. This allows the body to have a short break as, unlike allopathic medicine, herbs stay in the body over a longer period of time, so an occasional break in supplementation makes the body less dependant on them and increases the benefits of long-term supplementation. But if you are feeding herbs for healing or calming purposes then it is good to feed the herbs on a daily basis throughout one full blood cycle, which is 3 months (12 weeks). The condition should be vastly improved over this time to the point where further supplementation is no longer necessary, other than for general health maintenance herbs, which should ideally be fed according to the two months on and two weeks off program.

Herb tinctures are alcohol extracts of the herb, and are really ideal for when you need almost instant results. The tinctures are absorbed straight into the bloodstream, so are very useful if you need to calm a difficult or novice horse before loading into a horsebox, or clipping for the first time, etc. They are also very useful for fever or inflammation cases, especially when you use a combination of the analgesic and anti-inflammatory herb tinctures such as Devil's claw, Calendula petals, Meadowsweet, White Willow bark and Chamomile. If your horse has gone down with a virus, it would be a good idea to include Echinacea and Propolis tinctures in the blend. If using herb tinctures for just a few days consecutively, then you can use a maximum dose of 2ml 3x daily, otherwise if using on a regular basis, use only a total of 3ml daily (halve dosage for ponies). Dilute in a little water in a syringe and squirt directly on to the tongue. If you are concerned about the alcohol, as it is not very good for horses and can show up in drug tests and is a banned substance, put a little warm (not hot) water into a tablespoon, and then add the tincture so that the alcohol can evaporate off before putting it in to a syringe and administering it to the horse.

When used with a little knowledge, supplementing herbs to horses is a natural and inexpensive way to help keep your horse disease resistant and in peak condition. Fresh or dried herbs that are wonderful for maintaining optimum health of the horse are: Garlic, Kelp, Rosehips, Fenugreek seed, Comfrey, Dandelion and Nettle. More on these herbs and many others will be covered in future articles...

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