



FACT SHEET

Department of Animal Science, University of Connecticut

Effective Horse Management - Horse Management Series

Horse Management in the Fall

Jenifer Nadeau, M.S., Ph.D
Associate Professor, Equine Extension Specialist
Department of Animal Science

Fall can be such a busy time! When we think of fall we also think of leaves falling and crisp, cool air. Fall is a great time for the horse owner to consider dealing with leaves, drainage issues, acorns, and storm preparedness.

When leaves are falling all around one worry that many horse owners have is that their horse will consume red maple leaves resulting in red maple disease. The first thing that should be done is to confirm that the maple trees on your property are actually *Acer rubrum* or red maple, also known as swamp or soft maple. The key identifying features of a red maple are that it is a medium-sized tree generally 40 to 50 feet tall, that can reach 90 feet. The leaves generally have three major lobes and the notches or dips between the lobes are V-shaped. There is a reddish tinge to its flowers, twigs and seeds but it is most notable for the scarlet of its leaves in fall. As little as 1.5 -3 grams per 2.2 lbs of body weight can be an issue for a horse, causing acute hemolytic anemia (breakdown of oxygen carrying red blood cells), red-tinged urine (due to hemoglobin being passed out), lethargy, and depression. An affected horse will need to be treated with activated charcoal to absorb the toxin as soon as the problem occurs. Once damage has begun, horses require IV fluid therapy to flush and maintain the function of the kidneys, in addition to steroids, and possibly blood transfusions and oxygen therapy.

If any of your maples are truly red maples, then you will need to:

 Remove fallen branches and leaves as they fall or keep horses out of pastures when fresh wilted or dried wilted leaves are present

 Consider cutting down all red maple trees and also removing the stumps so that red maple leaves are not an issue.

Acorns can also cause toxicity in horses when consumed in a high amount. Although cattle are much more sensitive to this than horses, it is still good to make sure that horses are not consuming acorns. You may see the horse ingesting the acorns or find acorn remnants in the feed. Acorn toxicity can result in constipation, going off feed, colic, blood tinged urine, dehydration and swelling in the legs. If a horse develops this problem, they will again need activated charcoal initially and then IV fluid therapy. For acorn issues, you will need to:

 Fence off oak trees or remove them

 Clear fallen branches after a storm

 Keep your horse away from fallen oak branches and acorns

Drainage issues can be a problem around the horse barn. Autumn is a good time to make sure that all of your property is well-draining to eliminate the opportunity for puddles, and next season, ice to form. No horse owner wants to be injured or have their horse injured on ice. If you see an area of poor drainage, you can regrade the area or have a drain installed to deal with the issue. Also, be sure to clear gutters of leaves to prevent ice from forming in gutters when temperatures drop, leading to potential breakage and perhaps ice dams. Keeping gutters clean will also prevent habitat for flies and mosquitoes to breed in the summer.

Storm preparedness is another issue. You want to be ready to face whatever comes our way. So make sure that you have stocked up on extra feed and water and have your disaster kit ready. Now is the time to get ready for power outages, snow storms, reconsider fire safety, and how to prevent flooding. Fall rains often can cause problems in this area.

Fall is a great time to take a look around you, assess your horse-keeping situation and be sure that acorns, leaves and drainage don't cause issues for you. It is also an excellent time to make sure that you are ready to deal with whatever Mother Nature may offer in the seasons to come. So don't fall asleep, use fall as a preparation time to be the best horsekeeper you can be! Thanks, and keep on horsin' around!

The University of Connecticut supports all state and federal laws that promote equal opportunity and prohibit discrimination.

Sources:

Adirondacks Forever Wild. Trees of the Adirondacks: Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*).
<https://wildadirondacks.org/trees-of-the-adirondacks-red-maple-acer-rubrum.html>

Red Maple Leaf Poisoning of Horses.

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/facts/06-109.htm>

Burrows GE, Tyrl RJ. Toxic Plants of North America. Iowa State University Press, 2001.

The Morton Arboretum. Red Maple <https://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-plant-descriptions/red-maple>

Reviewed by:

Dr. Debra Hagstrom, Horse Extension Specialist
University of Illinois