

# Are You Ready to Own a Horse?

## Basic Essentials of Equine Ownership

Revised by Jason Turner<sup>1</sup>

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*Figure 1. A well cared for horse in acceptable body condition with access to adequate pasture and forage. (Photo by Jason Turner.)*

### INTRODUCTION

Many people are intrigued with the idea of owning their own horse, yet responsible equine (horses, mules, and donkeys) ownership may not reasonably fit your lifestyle or financial resources. This brief guide describes essential elements of responsible ownership. If you don't feel you can commit to owning an equine responsibly, you should seek alternatives. Some worthy activities that can be fun alternatives to owning your own horse include riding lessons at a local stable, a guided trail ride from businesses that specialize in that, getting involved with an equine interest group, or volunteering at a local equine rescue, horse show, or other equine-related event.

**NOTE:** Informational values in this guide are based on an adult 1,100-lb horse. At the time of this revision in May 2022, the rate of price inflation in the U.S. was between 5 and 10%. Therefore, readers may wish to adjust the following ownership costs with a 10% increase to better reflect prices for budgeting purposes.



## OWNERSHIP COSTS

*“Buyin’ the horse is the cheap part...ownin’ him is the real investment.” - An old adage*

A responsible owner provides adequate feed, salt, water, shelter, and hoof and healthcare on a routine basis (Figure 1). While costs can vary depending on your own circumstances, the following figures provide a reference point for what it costs to adequately care for one horse in New Mexico for one year.

- **Feed:** Expect to pay \$1,000 to \$2,000
- **Hoof care:** Expect to pay \$200 to \$550
- **Basic healthcare:** Expect to pay \$150 to \$300

Annual costs of horse ownership can be \$1,350 to \$3,000/horse, and including startup costs (shelter, fencing, tack, etc.) for the new owner, the total can exceed \$6,500—without including the price of the horse.

## SAFE FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

In addition to daily care and observation by the owner, some minimal requirements to own a horse include:

- A shelter (natural or constructed) of sufficient size (at least 150 square feet per equine) that offers the equine a means of avoiding severe weather (extreme temperatures over 100°F or under 20°F, freezing rain, etc).
- An area free of hazardous equipment, refuse, or obstacles that allows the equine ample space to exercise freely. Many city and/or county ordinances in New Mexico may require at least 1 acre of land to legally own livestock. Fences for these areas should be constructed of materials that minimize the chance of injury to the equine, and these fences should be at least 4.5 to 6 ft tall.
- Disposal of, on a daily or weekly basis, the 50 lb of manure per day the horse produces in order to maintain sanitary conditions and prevent problems with odor, flies, etc.
- Access to a vehicle (pickup truck and livestock trailer) to transport the equine in an emergency.



*Figure 2. Thin, unthrifty horses that may represent criminal neglect or abuse. (Photo courtesy of Shawn Davis, New Mexico Livestock Board Deputy Director. Used with permission.)*

- Hay and grain feeders, water troughs, stable-cleaning supplies, grooming tools, tack, and enough space to store all of these safely.

## ROUTINE CARE FOR ADULT HORSES

- A horse requires 10 to 12 gallons of clean, fresh, drinkable water each day.
- An average-sized horse will require at least 16 to 22 lb of hay and/or grain per day to keep itself in good condition. This is about 1/4 to 1/3 of a normal two-strand hay bale. Feeding less can severely compromise the health and well-being of the horse.
- The feet, or hooves, need to be trimmed every 8 to 10 weeks to ensure proper hoof care.
- Horses harbor internal parasites, so they require treatment (deworming) for these at least once every 6 months or more.
- Horses, like most animals, require annual vaccinations to prevent contagious diseases.
- Some horses, especially those over 10 years of age, may require annual dental care and a physical exam from a veterinarian.
- Novice owners should have males castrated by a licensed veterinarian as an aid in managing the horse and for the safety of others.

- Owners should be aware of local/county ordinances (zoning, number of equines allowed per acre, care requirements, etc.) that may apply to equine ownership in their community.

### **A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT**

The average life of a horse is 20 to 30 YEARS! So, the commitment to own and provide for an equine should not be made without considering how stable your financial resources are for caring for that animal. At a yearly expense of \$3,000, the financial commitment for care of the horse over its life can exceed \$60,000. In years past, there were many options for selling an unwanted horse. Today, however, there are few options for owners to be rid of an unwanted horse, and many times well-meaning equine owners sadly find themselves in a spot where they can no longer care for their animal. Significant expenses are tied to euthanizing a horse, and this often leads to horses being abandoned on public, private, and Tribal lands, which creates problems for all New Mexicans (Figure 2). This and other forms of neglect are criminal offenses that can lead to hefty legal fees, fines, or jail time for violators. See NMSU Cooperative Extension Guide B-714, *Criminal Consequences of Equine Neglect and Abuse in New Mexico* ([https://pubs.nmsu.edu/\\_b/B714.pdf](https://pubs.nmsu.edu/_b/B714.pdf)), for more information.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

These contacts can answer questions or direct you to resources on equine care.

Local County Cooperative Extension  
Service Agent: [aces.nmsu.edu/county](http://aces.nmsu.edu/county)

Local New Mexico Livestock Board  
Inspector or Office of the State Veterinarian: [www.nmlbonline.com](http://www.nmlbonline.com) or 505-841-6161

New Mexico State University Horse Specialist: [jturner@nmsu.edu](mailto:jturner@nmsu.edu) or 575-646-1242

New Mexico Veterinary Medical Association: [www.nmvma.org](http://www.nmvma.org) or 505-867-6373

American Association of Equine Practitioners “Get-A-DVM” Resource: <https://aaep.org/horse-owners/get-dvm>

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