

Can I feed my horses on lawn mower clippings and other garden waste?



Never feed your horse on lawn mower clippings or other garden waste! Feeding horses on lawn mower clippings can be very dangerous for several reasons.

When lawn mower clippings are freshly cut (and for sometime afterwards depending on the density of the pile etc.) they are fermenting (this is why it is warm or even hot when you put your hand inside a fresh pile of clippings). When a horse is given a pile of fresh clippings to eat they tend to gorge on them. The clippings have been chopped up into small pieces (by the mower), the horse does not need to chew them and therefore swallows the clippings without mixing them with saliva (which is what happens when a horse chews its food normally). This means that the clippings arrive in the stomach already fermenting and without the benefit of saliva to 'dilute' them (in the normal situation grasses that are eaten by the horse do not start to ferment to this extent until they are much further along in the gut where there are specialised microorganisms to help the process). The gases given off by the fermenting clippings can expand to the point that they rupture the stomach (which is fatal). Even if this does not happen the fermenting gassy clippings can cause colic or other very dangerous gastrointestinal disorders as they move through the rest of the gut.



Horses that live in or near suburbia have a higher risk of poisoning etc. from grass clippings and garden waste.

Horses are particularly susceptible to poisonous plants, and in this situation too a high level of gas builds up in the stomach, because they have a one way valve on the stomach that prevents vomiting (or even burping). If a human or a dog were to find itself in this situation they would be able to bring the offending food back up or at

least bring the gas back up and relive the pressure. A horse cannot do this and the pressure builds up to the point where the stomach can rupture.

When a horse eats lawn mower clippings they may also eat plants that they would otherwise avoid but because they have been chopped up with other more palatable plants the horse cannot detect them. For example horses are usually good about

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A double fence between a horse paddock and adjoining neighbours has many advantages. As well as reducing the chance of your horses eating anything dumped over the fence it may keep them back from an unsafe fence.

fence several feet to the inside of the perimeter fence may be enough. Post notices asking people to not feed your horse/s. Chat to neighbours about the risks and ask them not to drop any garden waste over the fence. In many cases people think they are doing your horse a favour and once the dangers are explained to them they will stop doing it.

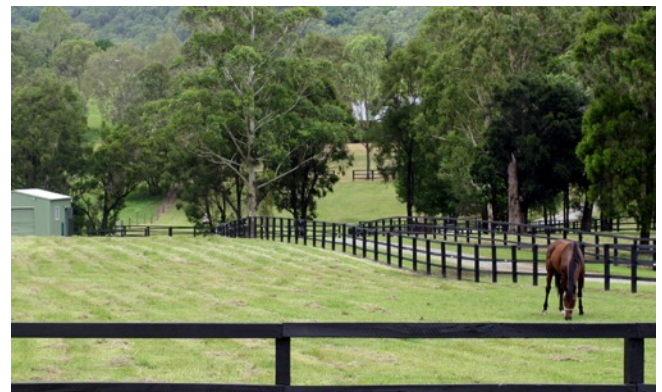
Horses may be able to be left in a paddock that has been mown/slashed provided that the clippings have not been gathered together into a pile. These clippings are scattered and soon dry out with little or no fermentation. Additionally the remaining freshly cut grass (rather than the clippings) is often sweetened with additional sugars stored in the plant leaf, so the horses are usually more interested in this rather than the cuttings themselves. Be aware though that horses prone to laminitis will be at risk of eating too much sugar in this case.

If you are at all unsure remove the horses from the paddock for several days. It is actually better to tidy up paddocks with a mower or slasher (a slasher cuts the plant once rather than shreds it into very small pieces as a mower does) just after you move the herd to the next paddock (as part of a rotational grazing system).

See our publications [Understanding horses and pasture and Horse pasture management 2011](#) for more information about managing pasture and horses.

avoiding eating poisonous plants but if they cannot detect them they will eat them along with the more palatable plants. In addition the lawn may have been sprayed with chemicals (such as pesticides and/or herbicides) which the horse will then ingest along with the clippings. Likewise garden waste (such as prunings from bushes and trees) can be dangerous unless you know for certain that they are not poisonous.

If your horse lives in a paddock that has suburban properties adjoining then be aware that the property owners may be dropping clippings/garden waste over the fence on a regular basis. It is usually a good idea to 'double fence' in such an area. A simple electric



A horse can usually be left in a paddock after slashing/mowing because the horse will tend to eat the new growth rather than the cut grass however you need to be aware that the new growth will be high in sugar. It is better to mow paddocks when the horses have been moved on as part of your rotational grazing system.

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