

Picky Eaters-Getting Those Supplements Down

By Claire C. Cox-Wilson RN, BA



You've had your hay analyzed, paid a balancing guru (or done it yourself) to balance your horse's diet & now have a custom mineral mix to address the imbalances in your horse's diet. You're feeling pretty good about yourself, after all you know how important good nutrition & mineral balancing are for your horse's well being.

However, the light of your life (aka master/mistress of your heart, your horse) doesn't agree. He/she takes one sniff of the meal you've prepared so lovingly and gives you the "why are you trying to poison me?" look.

Been there, done that! When I began the journey of custom mixes, I had 4 horses. All with different likes & dislikes but the one common denominator was their refusal to eat the painstakingly acquired custom mineral mix. At one time I had 5 individual one pound bags of my specific custom mineral mix in different flavors, courtesy of (the very patient) Rod from HorseTech. Two of my horses, the real finicky ones, wouldn't touch any of the mixes but my other 2 horses would half-heartedly eat the peppermint flavored one. Of course, Mr. T would eat quick setting cement if I offered it to him. On the other end of the spectrum, there's the master of my heart, Doc, the ultimate picky eater.

It was Doc that inspired me to create Witcheylady Potions, an equine herbal business. My potions were herbal flavorings/enticers & herbal blends that were intended to provide a bit of variety for the domesticated horse. It was important to me that these flavorings would be safe for the Insulin Resistant horse, so of course, I consulted with Dr. Eleanor Kellon & made it so. Regrettably, for several personal reasons this business no longer exists, although bits and pieces of it may still be floating around the internet.

I learned several things from my horses:

-) Most horses do not like artificial flavorings. Just as well really, as most are not good for them.
-) Variety is the spice of life. Horses, like us, get bored with the same thing over & over again. Find several herbs/flavorings that your horse likes & rotate them.
-) I found that most of my horses prefer their herbs/flavorings sprinkled on the top of their meal, rather than mixed in.



Before you start investigating flavorings, make sure that one or more of the following is not the root cause:

-) Dental issues?
-) Ulcers?
-) The feed bucket needing a good scrub?
-) Have you tried introducing the minerals in small amounts, rather than the regular serving all at once?
-) Moistening the ration so the powders stick to the pellets/beet pulp?
-) Are you sure it's not the carrier your horse is objecting to?

I started out by using the following study as a basis for my flavorings:

<http://animal.discovery.com/news/briefs/20051226/horsediet.html>

And then, I experimented & expanded.

The following powdered herbs are safe in 1 tsp amounts per 2# feeding for IR horses.

-) Alfalfa
-) Anise seed powder
-) Apple fiber
-) Beet root powder (this is number one in my horses' book)
-) Calendula
-) Chamomile
-) Fenugreek
-) Peppermint
-) Stevia

Cut & dried herbs can also be used to enhance a meal –do not feed more than ½ cup per meal. Favorites include:

-) Alfalfa (can also brew a tea for your horse & pour over pellets)
-) Calendula flowers
-) Chamomile flowers (good as a tea for your horse & pour over pellets)
-) Cleavers
-) Eyebright (helps with runny eyes)
-) Hawthorn leaves & flowers
-) Kudzu root
-) Marshmallow root
-) Meadowsweet (also makes a good tea)
-) Nettle
-) Peppermint (favorite tea at our house)
-) Red Clover blossoms
-) Red Raspberry leaves (helps with moody mares)
-) Rosehips
-) Spearmint (another favorite tea to pour over pellets)

Dried herbal blends mixed in with their meal are always greeted with enthusiasm. All my horses & donkeys love the mint herbs but only 2 really like chamomile. They all love a mix I like to feed them in the fall with echinacea, meadowsweet, rosehips, thyme & parsley. A blend I call Minty Fruit Salad with orange & lemon peels, strawberry & raspberry leaves and peppermint and dried apple slices is loved by all except by Mr. T, who doesn't like citrus. None of my horses like stevia, the herb that is so popular now as a sweetener. Of course that doesn't mean your horse won't like it.

Doc simply will not eat plain beet pulp. However, a handful or two of pellets (low sugar/starch in his case) & some herbs will make all the difference. Like I said, first you just have to discover what your horse likes.

I don't recommend making up your own blends unless you have some knowledge of herbs. Some herbs do not go well with one another & others work synergistically with each other. For example, you don't want to end up with 2 or more diuretics in your blend. There are also medicinal herbs, like devil's claw, boswellia, white willow bark, etc. that you don't want to include in your flavoring/enticing/fun blends. Medicinal herbs are a whole other chapter or actually... book.

Places to buy herbs:

I really like:

<http://www.mountainroseherbs.com/>

Plus, they also sell them in smaller quantities, like 4 ounces or 8 ounces, especially convenient if you are trying to determine your horse's likes & dislikes.

Sometimes I also use:

<http://www.starwest-botanicals.com/>

and sometimes you can get herbs delivered faster though Amazon.com.

Note: As a precursor to this article I recommend reading:

<http://www.desertequinebalance.com/articles/introducing-new-feeds>

About the author:

Claire C. Cox-Wilson is a moderator & longtime member of the on-line Equine Cushing's & IR Group and several of its sister groups. Claire, a retired RN with fifty years of experience as a horse owner & a graduate of all of Dr. Kellon's equine courses, assists horse owners throughout the US with nutrition & diet balancing.

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