

Horse Fences Demand Special Consideration

Fencing is the most important holding structure for horses, but yet one of the least considered by most owners.

"Because of the natural flight response of horses, they tend to injure themselves in fences more than most other livestock," admitted John W. Worley, University of Georgia agriculture engineer.

"Fences are necessary to safely confine horses, but yet provide them with the opportunity to exercise and graze," Worley acknowledged.

When constructing a fence, keeping the horse in, safety and aesthetics should be considered. "How much importance is placed on each function depends on the owner's budget, value of the horses and the owner's priorities," Worley said.

The minimum recommended height for perimeter fences is 5 feet. "This makes it safe for both people and horses," Worley contended. Division fences, however, can be as low as 4 1/2 feet.

Small pen fencing should be about 6 inches above the horse's withers. "This will discourage fighting over the fence and help prevent horses from leaning over the fence," Worley related.

Bottom of the fence needs to be eight inches from the ground. "Horses are less likely to paw at the fence and more likely to keep the fence line grazed," Worley analyzed. "Weed growth is also easier to control, and it adds extra height to the fence at no extra cost."

Rail fences are popular because they are attractive, highly visible and relatively

safe. "However, they are expensive to build, and maintenance can be significant," Worley warned.

Wooden planks, plastic boards and wooden boards coated with vinyl and split rails with rounded ends that slide into holes in posts can be used for rail fences.

It is preferable to use treated 2 x 6 oak or pine lumber and paint with tar-based paint. "Treatment discourages chewing of the fence," Worley noted.

Plastic fences are more expensive than wood. "They are popular because painting is not required, and there is no jagged end when a board breaks," the specialist clarified.

High-tensile polymer fence has the appearance of

a rail fence, but it is actually a wire fence. The rails are vinyl plastic 4 to 6 inches wide with two to three high-tensile steel wires encased. Some of the wires

While Worley has little experience with fences made from steel panels and continuous steel pipe fencing, he expressed caution that there must be enough space between the pipes so a horse doesn't get a hoof caught when pawing at the fence.

"Steel fencing would have a long life, but it would probably be the most expensive to construct initially," Worley pointed out.

Mesh wire fences are strong, durable and considered one of the safest fences for horses. "They are less expensive than most rail

can be electrified for security.

"These are less expensive than rail fences, yet are strong, look good and have high visibility," Worley credited.

Rubber belting or rubber strips from old tires and conveyor belts have been used for fencing. "These are soft and yielding with less injuries, but they do require considerable maintenance to keep tight in the summer," Worley commented. "Horses also tend to nibble on the rubber, and some rubber fencing with nylon threads have caused colic."

fences but more expensive than conventional farm woven fences with 4 to 6 inch openings," Worley described.

Openings in these fences are small enough to prevent hooves from being caught. There are no exposed sharp wire ends to injure a horse.

Aluminum wire, high-tensile smooth steel wire coated with vinyl and steel wires woven into vinyl tape can be used for electric fences.

"Electric fences with a properly designed fence charger are very effective for penning horses once the

horse has encountered the fence, but good visibility is important," Worley warned. "One or more strands of vinyl coated wire or high-tensile vinyl tape can be included in the fence to increase visibility."

Best results can be obtained when alternate strands of wire are electrified. "Proper grounding is essential, and instructions with the charger should be followed," Worley recommended.

A strand of electric fence wire can be added to a rail or mesh fence to increase the effectiveness and durability of the fence.

"If horses are damaging a fence by reaching over it to graze, a strand of electric fence across the top should prevent this," Worley explained. "Place the wire on insulators on the opposite side of the post from the wire or rails to prevent short-circuiting the fence."

Although Worley did not

initially comment about the use of barbed wire fences for horses, he recognized, "Many horses are kept in barbed wire fences and get along quite well."

However, the specialist expressed concern that horses have a higher chance of injury in barbed wire pens. "It's basically just a matter of the risk an owner is willing to take," Worley evaluated. "A horse can get hurt in any kind of fence, but there would be greater

chance with barbed wire, even though it can be used for an economical fence."

Wire should be covered with zinc to protect it from rust. Other wire also has vinyl coating to enhance visibility and increase longevity.

While pine posts pressure treated with preservatives are readily available at most farm stores, hedge and steel pipe posts will last longer. Line posts can be as small as 2 1/2 inches in

diameter, while corner posts for a wire fence should be at least 8 inches

Continued on page 10

For the Love of Horses . . . continued

Continued from page 9

in diameter.

Steel driving posts are lower cost, weigh less, can be driven easily and are fire-proof as compared to

wooden posts. They also help ground the fence, minimizing damage by lightning. Steel posts do not have as much strength against bending as wood posts, but wooden line posts

can be placed every 75 feet to help increase stability of steel posts," Worley advised.

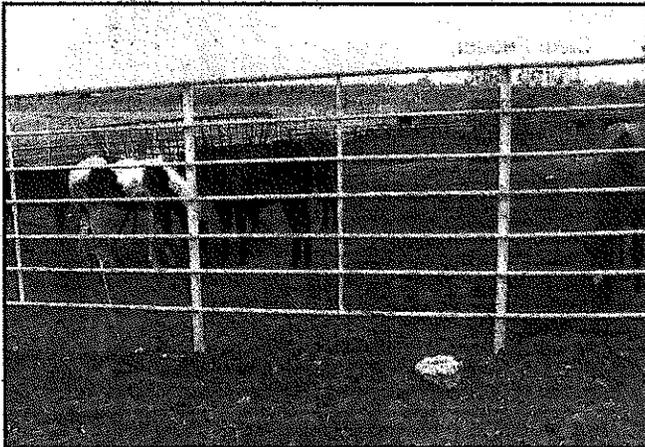
Corner posts should be 4 feet in the ground, with line posts 2 feet in the ground, set in even spacing 10 to 12 feet apart for most fences. Posts for tensile wire fence can be 25 feet apart, the specialist indicated.

Gates should be level with the top height of the fence and made from steel tubing or pipe, because horses tend to congregate

around them.

"Gates into a pasture need to be 14 to 16 feet wide to allow equipment to get into a pasture," Worley emphasized. "Minimum width for any gate a horse will be passing through is 4 feet."

A fence that is properly constructed and cared for will give long and trouble-free service. "Plan and follow a regular fence inspection routine for any needed maintenance," Worley concluded.



Continuous steel pipe fences and steel panels are the most expensive type of fencing for horses, but they are also the safest, according to ag engineers. Special attention must be paid to the distance between the pipes making certain it is adequate so horses don't get their hoof caught when they paw.

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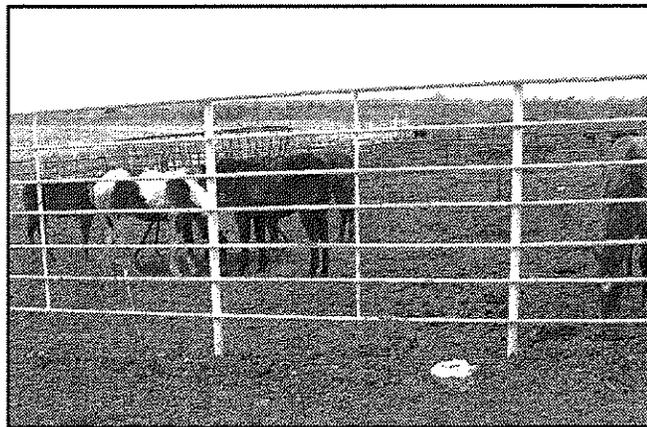
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