

Alternative Bedding

Snohomish
Conservation
District
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This fact sheet is one of a series written for people with rural acreages or small farms. It is geared to help you install a component or change a management habit that will benefit your farm operation and protect water quality. Snohomish Conservation District offers free assistance to landowners in managing small farms in an environmentally friendly way. Call to set up a free site visit. SCD is a non-regulatory agency that is a sub-unit of state government. SCD services most of Snohomish County and Camano Island.

Farms, no matter what size, usually deal with waste management on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Most other commercial farms have a waste management plan, however, many small farms and commercial horse facilities need to find safe, economical ways to manage their wastes. With increasingly more environmental issues and regulations, it will no longer be a matter of “business as usual” in terms of manure storage, composting, and the spreading of stall wastes. Now is the time to consider your options for bedding alternatives, before the mountain ‘out back’ becomes unmanageable.



Your choice of bedding will depend on a combination of personal preference, cost effectiveness, local availability, and type of horse housed. Bedding should be dust and mold free, absorbent, supportive, and easy to use and dispose of. If stall mats are used - depending on the horse - it usually isn't necessary for deep, or banked bedding.

Here is a list of what others are using and the pros and cons associated with each type of bedding:



Straw: Straw is the traditional bedding alternative, especially at reproduction and racing facilities. It is the cheapest bedding to use, but problems with ammonia accumulation are much higher. It

also needs to be bedded deeper so it won't shift, or expose bare floors.

Cedar Shavings: Although they smell great and look nice, cedar shavings are probably the worst choice when it comes to break down, compostibility, and usefulness beyond the stall.

Alder Sawdust: Alder sawdust is a great, composting bedding. A favorite among gardeners, it is much easier to get rid of. You can sometimes find FREE sources from cabinet shops, mills, etc. Make sure you know what type of woods are used. A sawdust/shavings mix also works well.

Pelleted sawdust: There are other local sources of commercial pelleted sawdust available in our area. Woody Pet and Dry Den are two such sources. Some commercial pelleted types contain enhancers such as zeolite used to absorb and deodorize odors. One great option people are turning to is plain wood stove pellets. Care must be taken to use 100% wood pellets which are not made from materials such as particleboard, as these may contain glues or toxins. You can find plain wood (alder/fir/very little cedar) stove pellets that are 5% moisture, kiln dried, and when bought in the summer, are cheaper than during wood burning season. When used in the stall, they break down quickly, are very absorbent, are usually less dusty than sawdust, and compost very well. In general, complaints of uneven footing or slipping problems are minimal.

Paper: Another popular bedding is newspaper. Now available from Weyerhaeuser, this shredded newsprint product is about 99% print free. It is virtually dust free, very absorbent, and makes great compost. The downfall is, the only outlet for it is in Kent, and each bale weighs 300 lbs. If you don't have a tractor, these large bales need to be used where they are unloaded.

Peat: Although not used much in our area, peat, or sphagnum moss, is extremely absorbent and makes great compost. It is easy to pick manure from, however, urine spots can become heavy. One complaint is that it makes for a dark and dingy looking stall, and when dry is very dusty, leaving a brown coating on everything. It is also not a renewable resource.

All of the bagged bedding types are a good option for people who have limited storage space as they can be kept outside under a tarp. They are easy to try out as well because you can buy a few bags at a time and aren't committed to a whole truckload.

Stall mats: Stall mats are a nice option for added comfort in the stall. With mats, you really only need bedding to soak up urine, not for a nice, deep, soft pillow (depending on the horse).



Also, when runs are available off the stall, most horses will prefer to defecate outside as they don't like to splash themselves. This also helps to keep the stall cleaner and bedding use to a minimum, saving money and time!

Bedding Comparison*

	LOW DUST	HIGH ABSORPTION	HIGH CUSHION SUPPORT	MANAGEMENT EASE	COMPOSTING RATE	LOW PALATABILITY	COST	COMMENTS
STRAW				X	FAST		LOW	Can shift & expose bare floor if not bedded deep enough or if horse is very active in stall
SHAVING	X	X	X	X	SLOW	X	MED.	Do not use treated wood or certain hard wood (black walnut, yellow poplar). Kiln dried pine shavings recommended
PAPER	X	X	X	X	MED	X	MED.	Not widely available. Avoid glossy paper. Requires regular mucking out or can become packed down
SAWDUST	X	X	X	X	MED.	X	MED.	Can be delivered pretty wet if not kiln dried, reducing absorbency. Variability between products
PELLETS	X	X	X	X	MED./FAST	X	MED.	Do not use treated pellets made from woods containing glues or toxins. Some brands contain odor controls. Kiln dried recommended
PEAT	X	X	X		FAST	X	HIGH	Dusty and harder to work with. Should have adequate ventilation

Here is a partial list of composting facilities in our area that accept the excess manure from livestock facilities.

Pacific Topsoils, Inc.
14002 35th Ave. SE
Bothell, WA 98012
(425) 337-2700
(Call here for container service)

Soos Creek Organics, Inc.
27525 Covington Way SE
Covington, WA 98042
(253) 639-0055
(Call here for container service)

Pacific Topsoils, Inc.
7500 NE 175th St.
Kenmore, WA 98032
(425)485-0701

Lord Hill Farms
18016 177th Ave SE
Monroe, WA 98272
(360) 563-0303

Pacific Topsoils, Inc.
4400 S 216th St
Kent, WA 98032
(253) 872-7431

Bailey Composting
12771 Springhetti Rd
Snohomish, WA 98296
(360) 568-8826

Pacific Topsoils, Inc.
17723 NE 70th St
Redmond, WA 98052
(425) 885-9194

Land Recovery Inc.
17601 Meridian Ave
Frederickson, WA 98375
(275) 847-7555

* Susan Raymond,
Equine Research Center,
Gulph, Ontario, is the
author of this chart and a
source for the article.

High Grass Farms
19505 SW 384th
Auburn, WA 98042
(253)833-7707



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