

Old cowboy tricks

- 1 **Break the ice twice a day.** Check every tank and bucket morning and evening. The extension folks say to look twice a day and take the ice off. A horse on hay needs a lot of water, and a skin of ice can stop him cold.
- 2 **Keep the water cool, not freezing.** Horses drink best when water sits around 45 to 60°F. They drink less when it is ice cold. A tank heater with a thermostat helps a lot. Chapter 8 covers heaters and how to run them safe.
- 3 **Watch who drinks and what comes out.** A horse on dry hay that drinks too little can get impaction colic. That is a blockage in the gut. Look for normal manure piles, damp and in balls. Small, dry, hard piles mean he needs more water. Call your vet if he quits eating.
- 4 **Keep plain salt out all year.** The extension folks say a horse should always have salt he can get to. Salt makes him want to drink. I keep plain loose salt in a covered tub in the shed. A plain block works too. Put it where it stays dry.
- 5 **Add hay before a cold snap.** A horse's feed needs can go up as much as a quarter in hard winter weather. Hay makes more body heat than grain does as it breaks down. So when the forecast turns bitter, I put out more hay the day before. Grain is not the answer to cold.
- 6 **Put your hand on his ribs.** Once a week, run your flat palm over his ribs, back and tail head. Most horses do best at a 5 or 6 on the 1 to 9 scale. At a 5, you feel the ribs easily and don't see them. A winter coat hides a thin horse. Your hand won't be fooled.
- 7 **Curry every day and do the thumb check weekly.** Curry in daylight, in small, firm circles. Once a week, part the hair at the mane, forelock, under the neck, withers, tail head and inner thighs. Look for tiny bugs