

ASK *the* Experts

Marylanders
want to know
about:
HAY

Q: *What should I look for when I buy hay for my horses?*

A: When purchasing hay for your horses, there are some key factors to keep in mind. First of all, you should examine the hay you are buying *before* the actual purchase is made. When examining the hay, there are two factors you should check.

The first factor is the presence of seed heads in grass hay or blooms in legume hay. Hay with fully developed seed heads or large, full blooms, identifies a very late maturity hay which will be classified as poor quality.

The second factor is the color of the hay. Good quality hay will be bright green with no mold or dust evident.

If the hay you are purchasing is light green in color or lacks the presence of a green tint, chances are the hay got rained on or sun bleached before it was made. It's hard to believe, but if drying hay gets rained on, it can potentially

suffer a protein loss of up to 43%, depending on the amount of rainfall. The protein levels will decrease in grass hay due to protein leaching. In legume hay, protein levels decrease due to loss of leaves. For example, if you see timothy hay with a seed head that is 6–8 inches



long and the diameter of a number 2 pencil and has no green tint to it, chances are, it is poor quality hay.

Buying hay for your horses is no easy task. Keep in mind that the activity level of your horses determines the quality of hay you need. Different qualities of hay will meet many nutritional requirements of horses. All in all, if you have any questions about determining hay quality and how it relates to your horse's nutrition, contact your local Cooperative Extension office or equine nutritionist.

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Got a Question? Get an Answer! *Equiery* readers can ask questions about their horses or horse farms and a panel of experts with the University of Maryland and Cooperative Extension Services will answer them. **If you would like the panel to answer your question directly, you must e-mail it to Dr. Amy Ordakowski Burk at ao38@umail.umd.edu or Erin Petersen at ep88@umail.umd.edu.** Or, you can fax your question to 410-489-7828 or mail it in to P.O. Box 610, Lisbon, MD 21765, and the questions will be forwarded to the panel, but only e-mailed questions will be answered directly. Written questions only will be accepted, and select questions may be used for publication in an upcoming *Equiery*.