



Farm Maintenance Tips For Every Season

By Jeannie Blancq Putney



All horse owners wish they had more time with their horses. For those who keep horses at home it is always a struggle to keep up with regular farm and barn maintenance and have enough time left to enjoy the horses. Performing proper building maintenance at regular intervals can save money and make the structure safer, and it can leave you more time to spend with your equines. Many tasks can be accomplished on an as-needed basis, leaving some simple safety checks and maintenance for each season.

Whether your farm includes a barn, sheds, or outbuildings, planning ahead is the first step. "Maintenance for your facility actually should begin when planning," says Mary Harcourt, co-author of *Complete Plans for Building Horse Barns Big and Small*. "Laying out the facility to make maintenance easy and affordable helps enormously," she says. "Likewise, construction of buildings and materials used can make maintenance easier." She says thoughtful planning allows for more time spent with your animals and less at the end of a pitchfork.

Linda Weatherbee of Circle B Barn Co. in Massachusetts agrees that many maintenance issues can be prevented in the planning process. "Our goal is functionality and buildings that are as maintenance free as possible," she says. "We want buildings that breathe. A barn that is really weather tight is great for people, but not so much for horses. They need constantly changing air because of their sensitive respiratory systems."

Architects have spent years trying to design the perfect barn, one that will allow a horse to be a horse and allow owners quality time with their animals. John Blackburn, president and senior principal of Blackburn Architects in Washington, D.C., focuses on quality designs that are healthy and safe for horses and decrease operational and maintenance costs.

"Poorly designed and improperly placed buildings may cost you more money in the end," he says. According to Blackburn, constructing barns and service buildings on higher ground is one of the first steps towards an economical, efficient structure. He also emphasizes the importance of natural lighting: "It's free, so let's use it. If we can design a barn that is lit naturally all day long and ventilates naturally, we're 99% there."

Barn design and placement can help reduce monthly maintenance, but what about pre-existing structures? "If you have a barn you inherited, learn where your problem areas are and be prepared to address them," says Harcourt. "That'll eliminate a lot of maintenance."

One of the easiest ways to build a maintenance plan for your farm buildings is by season. The extremes of each season obviously vary depending on geography, but the following list is a good starting point.

Spring

Anna Sharp owns a private farm in South Carolina. She says spring is when she checks her automatic fly spray systems. "They are very low-maintenance," she says. "I check the water level once a month. You can press a button to force them to come on to ensure they are working and there are no clogs."

Sharp says power washing her farm buildings is an important preventative measure against mold. She also checks the tack room's HVAC (heating and air conditioning) unit in preparation for hot weather. Having and checking a generator is one spring necessity, according to Harcourt.

"You should have your barn adapted to be generator compatible [because of snow in New England]," she says. "I have my well on my barn electric system so even in a loss of electricity, I can have water for my horses and for my house. I can live with a flashlight and candles, but not without water."

Therefore, she recommends checking water systems before extreme weather, such as when pipes might freeze. Harcourt says that termites can be a problem and says she termite-proofed her barn when it was built and has it treated every five years. She finds it to be a great investment, especially since her barn is attached to her carport, which is attached to her house.

Spring is the best time to inspect your



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roof, according to Larry Swetnam, a retired University of Kentucky agricultural engineer. "Roofs should be checked periodically and following any high wind occurrence," he says. "A visual inspection should identify any loose shingles, tin, metal, or other roof components which could be repaired before they become major issues."

◀ Be sure to replace storm windows with screens in the spring.

It is also a good time to focus on maintaining the outside of the barn, such as replacing storm windows with screen windows, or treating the structure with some sort of stain, which is the best way to preserve the integrity of the wood. "Direct sunlight is the worst thing for any wood-sided building, so prevention is key," Weatherbee notes.

Summer

In many areas, summer means it's time to break out the box fans, as horses spend more time in stalls to beat the heat. Ideally, the fans have been cleaned before they were stored, but a cursory check is a good idea. Sharp inspects all fan cords to ensure there are no exposed wires.

Because she doesn't have automatic waterers, Erin Novelli, who owns a Kentucky layup and broodmare farm, provides each horse with an extra hanging bucket in the summer—three total in each stall for mares and foals, and two for everyone else. She also makes sure stall salt block holders are full and secured tightly in place.

Novelli recommends keeping an eye out for hornet nests, which seem to show up near shavings sheds, and birds' nests, which she often finds in her barn's cupola.

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