Run-In Shed MAKEOVER

BY CHAD MENDELL

Take advantage of milder weather to repair or update your run-in shed

You've watched your horses hide in their run-in sheds from the harsh elements all winter. Now, they're finally ready to trade its protection for the sun's warm rays giving you the perfect opportunity to make a few improvements.

While safety is the most important reason to make changes, it isn't the only one. There are several relatively simple additions—such as attaching a storage room on a run-in or being able to convert it into a temporary stall—that can help simplify your daily routines.

Safety First

Before contemplating ways to save yourself time, you should first think about safety issues. A run-in with broken boards, slippery footing, faulty wiring, or one that is too small to handle the number of horses in the pasture is a precursor for disaster.

First, check the existing wood and replace any damaged boards, especially if they are part of the weight-bearing structure. For areas where the wood will be exposed, Cindy McCall, PhD, extension horse specialist at Auburn University in Alabama, suggests using oak, which is a hard wood that is less likely to be chewed than soft woods such as pine, spruce, or fir.

You can protect the exposed wood with a physical barrier such as plastic sheathing, metal angle brackets, or a tar-based paint designed to stop chewing (which will need to be re-applied periodically). Adding an extra flake of quality grass hay or other type of pacifier will also reduce wood chewing.

If your shed already has electricity, make sure the wiring is safe and out of a horse's reach. Depending on your area's building code requirements, wiring should be covered in plastic or metal conduit.

If your shed doesn't have electricity and is located within a reasonable distance to an electrical source, you can run a separate line to the shed. It's sometimes best to run electrical lines beneath the ground.

To run underground wiring, John Blackburn, of Blackburn Architecture P.C., says you should encase the wiring in metal or plastic conduit to protect it from being damaged. Blackburn recommends using wire designed specifically for outdoor and underground use. If you are planning to install heated waterers around your run-in shed, he suggests adding additional circuit breakers to accommodate the extra load. He says it's best to leave the wiring to the professionals.

What's One More?

This phrase can cause problems in situations where the run-in shed is too small to safely accommodate the number of horses in the pasture. The more submissive horses will be denied access to the shed, causing them to stand in the elements, or there might not be enough room inside the shed for a submissive horse to get out of the way of a more dominant one.

"Generally, the recommended space for horses in a run-in shed is about 75 square feet per horse," McCall says. "That's a little less than a 10-by-10 stall, but horses will cuddle up a little more in run-in sheds."

She says the amount of room a horse needs in a run-in really depends on the area's weather conditions (extreme weather conditions mean they use it more often), the size of the horses using the shed (a Miniature horse compared to a Clydesdale), their ages (yearlings are much more likely to huddle together than older horses), their temperaments (dominant horses need more personal space), and their sex (broodmares...well, you understand).

If you find your horses are lacking space in their run-in shed, it might be necessary to build an addition onto the existing shed or build a new shed. An addition can cut some of the cost by sharing a common wall. If you are going to add on to your existing shed, make sure you take into account accessibility (is the shed accessible for mucking with a tractor's front-end loader; can it easily be mowed around?), construction materials, and future uses (can it be used as a temporary stall).

For aggressive or dominant horses, McCall doesn't recommend adding a partition to an already existing shed to separate them. "You are better off allowing them to have more room to get away from each other," she says.

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Chewed or rotten boards pose health hazards to horses and should be replaced immediately with hard or treated lumber.

Water Flow

Dealing with water run-off can be aggravating at times, especially for ill-placed sheds. "For some reason, a lot of people

RUN-IN SAFETY CHECK LIST:

- There is enough space to accommodate all horses in the pasture.
- Chewed, broken, or rotten wood has been replaced.
- The flooring is dry and safe.
- Wiring is covered and out of a horse's reach;
- Nails or sharp edges don't come in contact with horses.

build them at the bottom of the hill thinking it's a less windy area, which is true, but then they have to deal with water run-off," McCall says.

A run-in shed should be situated in an area that offers adequate drainage so horses aren't constantly standing in muck or dirty water. A slight grade or slope away from the shed will help steer run-off away from it. If the shed is built on skids that allow it to be moved from one location to another, moving it to a more ideal location easily rectifies this problem. However, most sheds are pole buildings, meaning they use verticals poles buried into the ground. For these sheds, it is necessary to divert the water source using overhangs, gutters, or raising the shed's flooring to create a "high point" to divert water.

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To keep horses from kicking through metal siding on a run-in shed, install kickboards at least four feet high inside the shed.

Although trees seem to offer additional shade to the run-ins beneath them, they can also pose a danger to horses inside during severe weather. If necessary, trim large branches, or remove these trees altogether to ensure your horses' safety during bad weather.

McCall says, "Make sure sheds are deep enough (at least 20 feet) so the wind and rain doesn't come whipping in through the opening." If your shed isn't deep enough, adding a four- to six-foot overhang to the front might help keep rain and snow from blowing in.

A partial wall can be added on the open side, but that might create a "trap" for less-aggressive horses. An alternative to adding a solid fourth side to the shed is using a cloth material. A heavy canvas material or even an old rug hung from the front of the

run-in shed can help cut the wind. It might be necessary to walk your horses beneath the material several times to let them become accustomed to it.

Gutters can help reduce the amount of standing water around a run-in shed by diverting run-off water from the roof that would other wise puddle at the entrance. The water can be directed away from the shed or even into a catch trough to be used for drinking water.

Footing

A run-in shed's floor should stay dry and be easily cleaned. Bare dirt floors, especially those that are clay-based, can become wet and slippery with urine or manure. It's important to routinely clean a run-in to remove manure and urine soaked bedding to reduce health risk to horses.

STARTING OVER

A New Begining

There are some instances where renovating a run-in shed is not always the best route to take, according to John Blackburn of Blackburn Architecture P.C. of Washington, D.C. While remodeling your existing run-in shed seems like a great idea, you have to consider the cost of renovating versus starting over.

"Sheds are not always worth renovating," explains Blackburn. "By the time the farm owner gets around renovating them, it's easier and sometimes cheaper to tear them down and start over."

This is especially true for run-ins that are poorly located or require extensive repairs.

If you think your run-in shed is beyond resuscitation, and you're thinking about starting over, be sure to take the suggestions that have been discussed into consideration before determining its design. Make a list of everything you need or want to have in your new run-in shed, then decide what you can afford versus what you really need.

Choose a location that is easily accessible by foot and free of standing water or run-off. Make sure that a tractor can mow around the building and be used for cleaning. Before you start any type of major construction—whether it's a completely new building or adding on to and old one—be sure you obtain the proper permits and meet your area's building codes.—*Chad Mendell*

For heavy traffic, lay down a six- to eight-inch base of gravel and cover that with a layer of dirt and bedding—wood shavings, straw, or rubber particles.

Dominant Horses

A dominant horse in the herd can pose problems as they often chase more submissive horses from small sheds.

Partitions in the run-in sheds have been used to split the area into two or more smaller bays, but McCall says this can be dangerous with a dominant horse.

"You're safer leaving the shed wide open so that the submissive horses can get out of the way of the more aggressive, dominant ones," she said. "The smaller the space the horses have, the greater the risk of injury."

Extras

Run-in sheds offer a convenience to horse owners by allowing horses to remain in the pasture instead of have to walk them back and forth for daily turnout. But it's quite common for horse owners to lug various amounts of hay, grain, and whatever else is needed from the barn to the shed on a daily basis. While this can make for a great workout program, it defeats the point of the run-in shed's convenience.

Blackburn says, "The most common add-on feature we see is having a feed or storage room attached to the shed."

Stuffy Stabling

McCall says, "Some of the biggest complaints I hear about run-in sheds in Alabama is that the horses don't use them in the summer."

So why would a horse stand in the blazing summer sun rather than seek the shade of a run-in shed? Possibly because the typical run-in consists of three walls that are used to cut down strong winds in the winter, which in the summer can equate to a stuffy box. There are run-ins that are designed for predominantly warm areas that consist of only a roof to offer shade.

Fans and misting systems are sometimes used during the warmer months to make sheds more inviting. Adding overhead fans can decrease the run-in's temperature up to 15°F. The constantly circulating air also helps keep insects out of the shed.

Gutters, overhangs, and sloping the landscape away from the run-in shed's entrance will keep the inside dry and safe for horses.

Materials

Metal siding is less expensive than wood, but can pose risks such as a horse kicking through it and lacerating a leg. If you

already have wood siding, but it's starting to look ragged and needs replacing, you can cover it with metal siding. It will make the shed look more clean and updated, and the existing wood will prevent a horse from kicking through the metal.

If your shed has metal siding without a wood interior, now is the time to install that barrier. "A three-quarter-inch piece of plywood behind the metal siding will absorb a horse's kick and help prevent a horse from kicking straight through it," McCall says. Plywood should cover an area at least four feet high.

Concrete (such as cinder block walls) will have a longer life span than wood, but it can be expensive to construct and unforgiving if a horse kicks it. If your shed already has concrete sides, consider covering the inside with plywood. It will soften the impact of a kick and reduce injury to the horse.

"Boards that come in contact with the ground need to be treated lumber to prevent rot and decay that can weaken them," McCall explains. Exposed wood that might be chewed should be some type of hard wood since horses tend to chew less on oak and more on soft woods, she says.

She also suggests using screws instead of nails when replacing or adding onto your shed because nails will have the tendency to loosen over time.

The Extra Stall

There are times when you just need an extra stall. You might have an overnight guest, a broodmare and foal, a horse that requires restricted grazing, or be required to isolate a horse from others for health or rehab reasons.

To convert your run-in to a stall, Blackburn says, "You probably need to provide a small feed room to store feed, hay, and some bedding along with some basic tack. It is not absolute, but it sure would make it more convenient. In such cases, a water source must be located inside the shed rather than outside."

Attaching a large swinging gate to the run-in shed could allow it to be used to create a stall area when desired.

Take-Home Message

With a little tweaking, you can make your run-in shed safer for your horses, and you can even reduce the amount of time spent on chores and increase the amount you can spend with your horses.