

Introducing New Horses to a Herd

Do you have a procedure for introducing new horses to a herd? Herd movements and changes should be made considering the behaviours and temperament of each individual horses, as well as the yard routine.

It is important to have a set procedure for the introduction of new horses, especially if this is a rare occurrence for your yard. All parties should be made aware of any such procedures for both organisational and welfare reasons.

Whilst the transition will vary yard to yard depending on the exact set up, herd organisation and facilities available, you can find below our advice and considerations for dealing with new arrivals.

Understanding Herd Dynamics

Horses are social animals that form strong bonds and complex relationships. While aggression can occur, domestic herds rarely follow a rigid dominance hierarchy. Instead, horses often form smaller bonded groups, typically in pairs or trios.

Key considerations:

- Observe existing relationships within the herd.
- Recognise both antagonistic and friendly behaviours (e.g., grooming, synchronised movement).
- Introduce new horses gradually to reduce stress and prevent conflict

Space and Environment

Adequate space is critical for reducing tension and allowing natural herd behaviours during integration.

Ensure:

- There is enough turnout space to allow horses to avoid each other if needed.
- Shelter, water, and feeding stations are spread out to minimise competition.
- Physical barriers (fencing, double-fenced paddocks) are safe and secure.
- Steps are taken, to minimise crowding around openings (ie gates) for entry and exit

Steps for a Safe Introduction

Introduce new horses gradually through a staged process:

1. **Initial Quarantine (see [Biosecurity for New Arrivals](#))**
Stable and graze the new horse separately for a minimum of 14 days or follow your own biosecurity policy and procedures.

2. **Over-the-Fence Interaction**

Allow the new horse to observe and interact with the herd through a safe barrier.

3. **One-on-One Introduction**

Start with the calmest or most sociable herd member in a neutral area.

4. **Small Group Integration**

Gradually introduce the horse to more members of the herd, monitoring behaviour at each stage.

5. **Full Integration**

Once calm interactions are consistent, allow the horse to join the full herd.

Always monitor behaviour and remove the horse if signs of extreme aggression or stress appear.

Biosecurity Considerations

New arrivals can carry infectious diseases. Protect your herd by following strict biosecurity protocols. *This may differ depending on your own biosecurity/ welfare protocols and procedures)*

Before Integration:

- Require full vaccination records (influenza, tetanus, etc.).
- Conduct a health check and worming as appropriate.
- Quarantine for at least 14 days, ideally in a separate paddock or stable block.
- Avoid shared equipment and contact with other horses during this time.

During Quarantine:

- Monitor for signs of illness (fever, nasal discharge, coughing).
- Use separate feed buckets, grooming tools, and mucking out equipment.
- Practice good hand hygiene and boot disinfection between horses.

Final Tips for Yard Managers

- Communicate clearly with horse owners about the process and timeline.
- Keep written records of introductions, herd changes, and any incidents.
- Observe and assess changes in behaviour and health post-introduction.
- Maintain flexibility—some horses may take longer to settle in than others.
- Ensure you have the contact details of the owner, and their preferred vet and farrier in case of any issues during the transition period.

Every yard is different, and so is every horse. It's essential to consider your specific yard setup—including available space, facilities, and turnout arrangements—as well as the individual temperaments and behaviours of both the existing herd and the new arrival. Some horses may be more assertive, anxious, or socially selective than others, which can significantly influence the introduction process. Before implementing any integration plan, discuss the approach thoroughly with the yard owner or manager. Ideally, they should be present during

the first introductions to help monitor interactions and intervene if necessary. A thoughtful, collaborative approach helps ensure a smoother, safer transition for everyone involved.

In a perfect world, the new horse shouldn't be introduced to the existing herd until there is evidence of friendly behaviours, such as mutual grooming or grazing in close proximity in the next field. All horses in the herd should be monitored for stress during this time.

Provided that care is taken, it's rare that introducing a new horse to a herd fails, but in the event of an introduction being unsuccessful, changes to group make up, extra space and management alterations usually solve the problem.

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