

“Five acres and a horse” The dream... and the reality

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Congratulations on considering the joys of horse ownership – for lots of people, owning a horse is a lifelong dream! The rewards are many: rides through open summer fields and down crunchy, colorful fall trails, looking out your window and seeing your horse munching contentedly in the pasture, and the simple companionship that only a horse can provide.

For new horse owners, however, the fulfillment of this dream can bring harsh realities and unanticipated difficulties. Circle P Sanctuary presents this brochure not to deter you from your dream, but to help you understand the “Four Cs” – Consider, Cost, Care & Commitment – and make a smooth, trouble-free move to owning your horse.

CONSIDER

Safety first

- Take your time – get to know your horse before you jump on and gallop off!
- First-time owners should never get a young, undertrained, “green” horse, especially for a child
 - o Serious injury and/or death are a real possibility when working around horses, especially green horses.
- Paying more for an older, seasoned, “beginner’s horse” is well worth the extra money

Knowledge

- Does my state/city/township have specific regulations concerning horse ownership?
- Always “look a gift horse in the mouth!”
 - o There is no such thing as a free horse
 - Even if the horse is in perfect health, does it have behavior problems or other issues – why is someone giving the horse away
 - A well-cared for, safe, healthy horse will very rarely be re-homed
- One horse does not fit all
 - o What do I want to do with my horse?
 - o Trail riding, showing (Western or English), jumping, etc.
- “I’m a horse, do you know me?” (horse behavior)
 - o A horse is like a five year-old
 - Bored horses will chew fencing, barn (or house) siding, eat the bark off trees and generally get into things
 - o Get to know your horse through daily observation

- Knowing what is “normal” behavior for your horse will help you know when something is not right
 - A horse is not a lawnmower
 - Horses will eat only what tastes good and leave the rest
- Am I going to keep my horse at home, or board it?
 - If boarding, can I find a suitable place, close-by that has reliable people who will take good care of my horse?
 - Will it be full board, or will I have to do some of the work?
- Where will I ride my horse?
 - My own land, state parks, neighbor’s land (get permission first!), along the road (safety first!)
- How will I transport my horse?
 - If riding areas are not close by, trailering is necessary
- Where will I turn for help when I have questions?
 - Ask ten horse owners and you will get ten different answers!
 - Different training methods
 - English vs. Western riding
 - Personal experience
 - Day to day care

There are endless resources available, both printed and via the internet. Knowledge is key to successful ownership.

COST

The cheapest part of owning a horse is the purchase price

Barn/shelter

- Dry, well-built shelter of adequate size
- Box stalls should be a minimum of 10’ x 10 ‘ per horse
- Safe and secure storage for feed, tack, grooming supplies, wheelbarrows, manure forks, rakes, buckets, blankets, etc.
- Water & electricity are luxuries that are well worth the time and money invested

Fence

- Minimum pasture area of 1 acre *per* horse is recommended (check local regulations)
 - Over-crowding causes stripping of pasture grass
 - Pasture areas may require mowing to help keep weeds down
 - In wet weather, their hooves will tear up the ground, making a muddy mess
- Sturdy, safe fencing

- Woven-wire horse fence vs. wood rail vs. electric, or a combination
- Barbed wire is *never* suitable – it will cost more in vet bills in the long run than proper horse fence

Feed

- Hay
 - Horses will graze up to 18 hours per day. With out sufficient pastures, you will need to supplement hay year round
 - During the coldest winter months, a horse can drop 50 pounds in one day trying to stay warm
 - Horses eat an average of 1/4 to one complete bale of good quality hay per horse, per day
 - One horse needs an average of 100 bales of good quality per year
 - That’s a lot of manure to deal with! How will I manage my manure?
 - Are there sources nearby to purchase hay?
 - Will they deliver, or do I need to transport it?
 - Where will I store my hay?
 - Hay needs to be up off the ground (on pallets), and kept dry
 - Feeding moldy hay may result in serious illness
- Grain
 - Not all horses need the same feed
 - Pellets, oats, sweet feed etc.
 - Does my horse need added vitamins or minerals?
 - How I use my horse and his or her body type will determine what grain I feed, how much, and how often or if at all
 - Daily feeding times need to be on a set schedule
 - Horses become nervous and fret when feed times are late

Water

- A horse can drink an average of 10 gallons of water per day – more in the hottest weather
 - That’s a lot of urine!
 - Horses confined to a stall will require daily bedding changes
 - Winter water
 - Freezing streams, buckets and tanks need constant attention
 - A horse without sufficient, **clean**, water can develop bowel impactions that require emergency vet care

CARE

Veterinary care

- Horses have unique health needs which usually require the veterinarian to make a “barn call”
 - Trip charges, diagnosis and treatment costs
 - Costs of routine vs. emergency calls

- Serious conditions can require trips to, and stays at, a veterinary hospital
- Some conditions will require you, the owner, to administer medications and carry out treatment plans
- Horses need a *minimum* of one routine vet call per year
 - Routine injections and boosters
 - Parasite control is critical
- Will I be able to find a large animal vet willing to come to my barn?
 - Shortage of large animal vets
 - Call for client openings and prices *before* you bring your horse home!

Dental Care

- It is critical horses of ALL ages receive annual dental care
 - In order to absorb nutrients, horses need to be able to properly chew their food
 - As a result of poor dental care a horse may be a messy eater, dropping grain, creating waste for the horse and your pocketbook
 - If left unattended, it is not uncommon for horses to lose weight and a good body condition
 - Before a horse begins training under saddle and with a bit, talk to your dental care provider about wolf teeth

Farrier care/Hoof care provider

- On average, your hoof care provider should visit every 5 to 8 weeks
 - A horse's hooves grow continually (like your fingernails) and need trimming – and possibly shoes
 - Neglected hooves will cause pain and possibly leg deformities
- Check to make sure your area hoof care providers are taking on new clients
 - Discuss what is routine care vs. corrective hoof care or emergency care and the cost involved in all of them

COMMITMENT

Riding off into the sunset is the reward for all your hard work and commitment! When you picture yourself or your child spending happy hours in the saddle, consider the commitment and work that goes into daily horse ownership.

- About 90% of horse ownership is “groundwork”
- Are you up for the daily work – especially in the cold of winter and the heat (and flies) of summer?
 - Daily care includes stall & barn cleaning, grooming, tack cleaning, and more
 - Daily exercise (especially if stalled)
 - A horse is like an athlete and must be kept in good condition
 - Ongoing work includes barn and fence maintenance, pasture care
- Time away
 - Who will care for my horse if I go away, even for a day?

- Reliable, knowledgeable help can be hard to find (and expensive)
- If my horse becomes sick, am I willing to commit the time and money to his care?
- A horse is a 24/7 lifetime commitment – some can live 30 to 40 years
 - What will I do if I go off to college, move or become too busy for my horse?
 - What if my horse becomes disabled and can no longer be ridden?
 - Unsound, but not in pain
 - What if something happens to me?
 - Making provisions for my horse’s care
 - What if my horse dies, or has to be euthanized?
 - What do I do with a 1,000-pound body?
 - Burial
 - Health & legal issues
 - Backhoe availability & costs
 - Rendering
 - Costs
 - Cremation/incineration
 - Costs
 - Biodigestion
 - Costs
 - What if I no longer want my horse?
 - Finding a good, caring owner is not easy
 - Donating to a horse facility or surrendering to a rescue
 - Many programs are overcrowded and are trying to place horses too

For a state by state listing of horse rescues visit unwantedhorsecoalition.org

RE-CONSIDER

Now that you know the basics of horse ownership, consider once more whether or not you want to make the commitment.

- Alternatives to horse ownership
 - Leasing
 - Sharing/share-boarding
 - Taking lessons
 - Involvement with horse activities
 - 4-H
 - Local horse and pony clubs
 - Volunteering
 - Helping out at a stable is a great way to learn about horses, their care, costs, and the commitment involved

Thank you for taking the time to consider all the aspects of horse ownership. Enjoy your interaction with horses, whether you decide to own, lease, or just take lessons for the fun of it. It IS fun, but it's work too. If you love horses, it will all be worthwhile!