

Minimizing Your Hoof Print

BY ALISON SCHULTZ

Whether you're looking to build a new barn or are maintaining a current horse haven, there are many ways to get greener. (I'm not talking about manure stains.) It might be fair to say that current horse owners and those thinking of investing their lives in horse property are in it for the long haul. This means, for the duration of your residence at your Chez Equine the green choices you make today will reap big Savings\$ as well as all the other rewards of horse ownership. Sustainable options are a win-win situation all around – for you and your pocket book, for your horses, for your land and the flora and fauna surrounding you. Here are some things to consider when it comes to having a smaller ecological hoof print.

Building new? Be sure to get a site evaluation on your property to get an overview of the drainage patterns, hot and cold spots, how the land is shaped and how the wind moves through your land. This will provide valuable information that will help you decide what to build and where. Soil and water analysis is also recommended to determine if there are any toxins in the area that will need to be cleaned up before building begins and your horses start grazing or drinking out of the stream that runs through the property.

Fence me in green: There are a variety of fencing materials on the market now that are safe for your horses and the environment (and don't need to be repainted!). Check out LifeTime Lumber rails and EnviroSafe posts (both of which are LEED certified). Fencing materials made from high-density polyethylene (HDPE) is another eco-friendly option.

Recycled rubber stall mats might not be enough: Consider how the mats are installed to be sure that there is no ammonia buildup beneath them that can cause respiratory issues for you and your horses. Ammonia can also seep into the ground and into the ground water.



"GREEN" BARN

A "green" barn designed by Blackburn Green Barns of Washington, DC (www.blackburngreenbarns.com). This barn was made with "green materials": Recycled-content, light-colored roofing with highly reflective finish, recycled-content concrete blocks; low VOC stains/sealants; FSC certified wood products. It was also designed to use solar panels for energy needs.

Deck the interior barn spaces: For the parts of the barn that are meant for humans only (such as lounges, tack rooms, etc.) reuse materials instead of buying new.

Checkout ReSource or Freecycle for furnishings or materials and get creative about repurposing 'stuff'.

Light bulbs: change the bulbs in your barn (and house!) to the fluorescent kind that'll save you instant energy. Your horses will appreciate this bright idea, and you'll benefit from the extra padding in your wallet.

Use biodegradable equine products: Use only biodegradable horse supplies like shampoos, conditioners, sprays and wipes. Every little bit counts. Plus, the run off of these products will not adversely affect the environment by seeping into the soil, and eventually the ground water.

Be pesticide free: Incorporate organic pest management into your horsekeeping plan. Put up bird houses for insect eating birds (like swallows) to nest nearby and feed off the seemingly endless supply of pesky bugs that harass you and your horses. Release the good bugs on your property to manage the less desirable ones and to act as an herbicide. Set some fly parasite out in the manure pile to devour the smorgasbord of fly larvae that's incubating therein. And remember, non-poisonous spiders are good bug catchers.

Manage your pastures wisely: Rotate pastures for grazing to prevent overgrazing. Have your soil tested before you fertilize so you only use what you need and to prevent excess fertilizer from seeping into the ground water. Prevent and learn to manage muddy pastures by rerouting water drainage patterns on your property to prevent water from collecting.

Compost: It's good for your property and your garden. We said a lot about this issue in the last issue of the newsletter...

Go solar: your home or barn roof could be put to good use to capture the energy of the sun and feed that energy back to your power supply, and perhaps even back to the grid.

Use biofuels: Got a diesel truck? Consider converting it to biofuels (it's what the diesel engine was originally made to run on). This will not only help cut oil consumption, but also emissions.

Keep vehicles and farm machines well maintained: This ensures not only their longevity, but also their efficiency. Routine maintenance keeps fuel costs low if your motorized stock is in good working condition.

Recycle and reuse: Got a stack of supplement buckets? Transform them into grooming buckets, water buckets, stools, saddle racks. Be creative in the re-use of many of your equine product by-products. Keep recycling bins in the barn to collect the any recyclable waste.

Still have questions? Be sure to check out the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Services (ATTRA) website at www.attra.ncat.org and the Horses for Clean Water website at www.horsesforcleanwater.com for answers to any of your equine sustainability questions ranging from compost, to bugs, to poultry, to green building barns.

