



Rugging

Rugging appropriately

The UK's mild, wet climate makes rugging decisions tricky. We often see horses suffering not from the cold, but from over-rugging, sweating, and skin conditions caused by damp, heavy rugs left on too long. Over rugging can lead to more serious issues such as colic from overheating.

Why Rug at All?

You may choose to rug if your horse:

- Is clipped
- Is in hard work and needs coat control
- Is elderly, underweight, or a poor doer
- Lacks natural shelter or struggles in bad weather

But remember horses are naturally equipped to handle UK winters, often much better than we think. Over-rugging can create more harm than good.



Overheating & Colic

Overheating in rugged horses isn't just uncomfortable — it can be dangerous.

- Sweating under rugs can cause electrolyte imbalance, dehydration, and even contribute to impaction colic.
- If a horse is overheated, it may drink less water or become lethargic.
- Horses with heavy rugs on during a sudden warm spell (common in autumn) can't thermoregulate effectively.



Signs of overheating under a rug:

- Damp coat underneath
- Increased respiration rate
- Lethargy or dullness
- Reduced appetite or droppings (possible colic warning)



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Rain Scald (Dermatophilosis)

Rain scald is a common skin infection we see more of in autumn and winter, especially in wet regions like the southwest.

What causes it?

- A bacterium called *Dermatophilus congolensis* thrives in damp, warm environments.
- It enters through damaged or constantly wet skin, especially under non-breathable or leaking rugs.



Signs of rain scald:

- Tufts of matted hair or scabs, often on the back, rump, or flanks
- Skin may be sore, with pus under scabs
- Often confused with rug rubs or fungal infections

Rugging guide: rug for the horse, not the human!

Here is a simplified rugging guide assuming your horse is turned out with shelter:

Horse Type	Temp Range	Rug Recommendation
Unclipped native	5 – 10 c	No rug or light weight waterproof sheet
Unclipped TB/WB	10 c +	Light to mediumweight (100g – 200g)
Fully clipped/elderly	<5 c	Medium/heavy with neck
Hard keeper/ underweight	<10 c	Medium or layered rugs
Young, healthy, unclipped	Above 0 c	Often no rug needed

Rugs can hide wounds and changes in body condition therefore it is important to remove rugs often.

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