

Herbs for anxiety in horses

Prior to giving your horse any herb it is imperative that you know why you are using the herb and what side effect/s and contraindications apply. Typing the name into a google or yahoo search (on the web); will usually give you this information.

(http://www.google.com.au/advanced_search?hl=en or <http://search.yahoo.com/search/options?fr=fp-top&p=>

Ask yourself some questions before you start.

What level of anxiety are you experiencing? Could there be other factors such as food : work ratio, temperament , past experiences, first time out with a new owner, your nerves; which may all be adding to the anxiety in your horse?

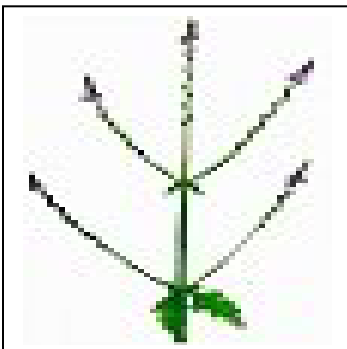
Some horses will have past “baggage” (eg: past race horses may get anxious if near a race track), which will cause undue stress and anxiety when they are out. In the past I have always defined a full history of the horse to see what other factors are the root cause.

You could even be the root cause, if you or another member of your party get flustered, anxious or nervous this will rub off on a susceptible horse. Keep your cool, work around your horse in a slower pace than you normally would, allow time when you arrive to “chill out” have a coffee and a walk around. Leave the horse to adjust to the new environment with some hay and water. I like to leave my horses a good half hour to adjust whilst I go away from the float.

Some useful herbs for anxiety or nerves in your horse are:



Chamomile: (*Matricaria chamomilla*) flower heads are used for this herb, will swab if not steeped in boiling water. Chamomile horse's often have loose manure when they are anxious this herb can be feed twice a day at a rate of one large handful or 1/2-3/4 cup per feed (steeped). No contraindications have been found. Chamomile tea is often also an effective calmative for the rider as well. Chamomile is an effective sedative and has an positive effect on anxiety and overexcitement at shows or events; and is also good for digestive aid for upset stomachs in horses.

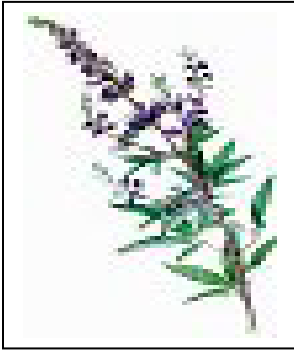


Vervain: (*Verbena officinalis*) flowers and leaves used in the herb.

Alternate Names: Holy Wort, Herb Of The Cross, Ma Bian Cao (Chinese)

These are the very nervous, fidgety, heavy sweating horses when in an anxiety state. Vervain horses are usually highly

conscientious horses who need herbs to accustom them to new surroundings; or restore calm to the tense horse. Vervain is also useful for mares with PMT. Note: Vervain herb goes blue in water. Do not feed to pregnant mares.



Chaste Tree Berry: (*Agnus castus*) Chaste Tree Berry is a natural hormone balancer (especially progesterone) excellent for moody mares who hate to be touched when they are in estrus. The herb also has calmative and sedative properties.

How to feed herbs:

Start with good quality herbs. I feed herbs; starting on a weekend when I can keep an eye on the horse. (First time you feed). Commence feeding the herb at least four weeks prior to a competition. Start with a large pinch of the herb in the feed and work to a handful of dried herb steeped in boiling water. (Quantity will depend on the size of the horse average horse weight being 450kgs). Most herbs are best wet with boiling hot water (this is steeping or making a tea) and left to cool (12hrs) and all the wet herbs and liquid used to wet down the feed. With a fussy eater you may need to introduce slowly.

I have found that some horses will have a calmed effect within two days and other take up to a week. When the horse has calmed you can feed for another week (two weeks total) then stop feeding. This will then give you a benchmark for the effectiveness of the herb on the horse. The “body” seems to remember the effect of the herb; you will then only have to feed for two days prior to competing at the full strength to get the same effect.

Note: all herbs have there plac; to be able to use them to advantage with your horse you will need to know what disadvantages they may cause and if they are needed at all.

Some herbs are swab able you will need to keep a look out on the web to see which herbs swab and which herbs can be used legally within your discipline of competition. Chamomile has been rumoured to be swab able if fed dry. If steeped in boiling water it is believed to be un swab able.

Rescue Remedy: I have also had excellent results from rescue remedy with many of my own horses. Be careful when administering I suggest you place drops on a sugar cube or cut apple to feed. The rescue remedy applicator is made of thin glass which could easily be bitten if placed in the horse's mouth.

Happy competition days are always a combination of being prepared and above all keeping your self realistic about the expectations of yourself and your horse.

You can as you know only ride "the Horse you have on the day" but some times herbs can help.

Cheers for now Kaye Hannan – equine therapist