

Anyone lucky enough to keep their horse at home will be able to spend as much time as they like with him — work and family permitting. Not having to travel to a yard saves time and can make it easier to fit everything into a frenetic daily routine. It can also be a more affordable option, although there may be upfront costs if the property is without equestrian facilities, with stables, field shelters, or fencing to build or erect. Maintaining everything, from the buildings to the grazing, will also fall to the new owner, and they will need to organise muck heap removals and hay deliveries too.

However, keeping a horse at home means that a new owner may miss out on the social aspect of a livery yard.

"I've had a few clients who have brought their new horse to me for the first couple of months so that they have support and company to hack out with. It can be quite daunting being on your own," cautions Natalie.

THE GRASS IS GREENER! TIPS FOR GOOD GRAZING

"Before bringing a horse home, get the health of your soil and grass sward analysed," advises Jonathan Holmes, an independent agronomist who also lectures in soil science and agriculture.

He recommends that anyone looking to sow grass seed should analyse the soil type first to see what ratio of sand, silt and clay they have, so that they can match the grass species to the soil type. He cautions against ryegrass, though: "It's full of non-structured carbohydrates which produce far too much energy for horses and exacerbate the laminitis risk."

"The most cost-effective management strategy for any horse pasture is to harrow appropriately in the autumn and spring," Jonathan says. "It rejuvenates microbial activity in the soil for the benefit of grass nutrition and productivity."

Jonathan also advises thinking about funding. "Maintaining good grazing for a horse always takes more time and money than you think."

Home from home

Stables should be a minimum of 12x12ft, or larger for bigger horses. Natalie's yard has an American barn, which she says is fantastic for keeping everything dry and allowing the horses to see each other.

"The downside is that if a horse picks up a virus or cough it can spread more quickly. This is why we have isolation stables too," she says.

Natalie prefers stone buildings to wooden ones.

"They're cool in the summer and durable," she notes.

On the fence

Secure fencing is vital, and Natalie advises checking what the horse is used to — and what he respects. From a maintenance point of view, she prefers electric fencing.

"Post and rails looks nice, but over time, especially with regular wet British winters, it can degrade and break. Also, horses tend to chew the wood unless you put electric on the top," she says.



Wooden stables will be hotter in the summer than stone

Keeping mud in check

Former event rider Kerry Weisselberg ran her own yards for over 40 years before starting her business, Mudcontrol, to help other equestrians protect their horses and their grazing. As Kerry knows only too

Perfect pasture? As if horse ownership isn't a steep enough learning curve for relatively new equestrians, caring for paddocks for those keeping their new charge at home is likely to be equally challenging

