



Need A Drink?

By Heidi J. Potter

We know that horses always need unlimited access to clean, fresh water. On average, a horse will consume 12-20 gallons per day, depending on weather and workload. However, are we aware of their drinking habits?

Most horses will seek out water after eating grain, hay and/or grazing. In many programs horses are taken out of the field or paddock and brought directly to the cross ties or hitching rail. At that point it may be several hours before they will be returned to any water source.

Please be mindful where he is in his daily cycle when you go out to get a horse for work. Have you seen him just take a drink? Did he recently finish a meal? Did you just take him away from his pile of hay?

To help ensure his good health just stop by his water source for a moment to see if he is interested. If you are paying attention the horse will generally “tell” you that they are interested in water as you are passing by it. Some horses will speak very quietly, so be mindful about reading them. Others will boldly pull you in that direction. They are “shouting” to you so please be sure to listen. Then be prepared to practice patience as some (especially those who lack confidence in the herd or are lower down in the pecking order) will need to look around, drop their nose, pick their head up, look around and then settle in for a drink. Others will need to splash for a bit before drinking. Some will take a drink, take a breather and drink again.

Placing a large muck bucket just outside the entrance to the barn helps volunteers and barn staff to remember stopping there before entering. This works well as horses will generally drink faster from a large bucket. They don't have to worry about others in the herd sneaking up to move them off. You also don't have to wait for an automatic waterer to refill which can seem like an eternity if you are in a hurry.

By putting a watering procedure in place you help ensure the overall health and happiness of your equine partner.