Some horse owners feed a few fruits and vegetables to their horses to lend variety and add interest to their bucket food, with the most popular items being apples and carrots. Others use these tasty foods to encourage poor eaters to eat their feed stuffs or supplements. I like to offer a wide variety of them to my horses as nutritious treats.

During the seasons when all of the wonderful fruits - including berries, melons, peaches, nectarines, etc - are so deliciously ripe and readily available to us, have you ever wondered if your horse would love some of these tasty treats too?

With the wide variety of fruits we have available almost all year long, your horse may welcome some new and healthful taste treats. Most fruits are full of vitamin C and other valuable nutrients. What better thing can you do for your horse on a hot day than to offer him a cool juicy slice of red ripe watermelon? It’s a nice change from the usual slice of apple. Make him a fruit salad and see what he likes!

Berries and fruits offer more than just pretty colors, as those colorful pigments of reds and dark blues to purples mean they are a storehouse of some of the best known phytochemicals, such as beta carotene, lutein, and lycopene. These have a positive effect on our health as well as our horses’ health. Those colorful skins also contain flavonoids, which work as antioxidants in the body.

Some of the fruits you may want to try are:

**Bananas** – Full of potassium; some people feed them with the peel on. Some competition riders are feeding their horses bananas between events like some tennis players eat bananas between sets.

**Apricots, Peaches, Plums and Nectarines** – Offer just a couple slices for flavor and be sure to take the pits out! All of these fruits are an excellent source of beta-carotene (vitamin A), vitamin C, potassium and fiber. Apricots also are an excellent source of iron, and plums are a great source of vitamin K.

**Strawberries, Blackberries, Raspberries and Blueberries** – Strawberries contain more vitamin C than blueberries, with blackberries and raspberries also containing vitamin C and potassium. Vitamin C is needed for immune system function and for strong connective tissue. Strawberries also add a bit of calcium, magnesium, folate and potassium.

**Grapes** – Grape skins contain resveratrol, which is a powerful antioxidant. Grape seed extract is used as a natural antihistamine and anti-inflammatory agent so your horse may benefit from having a few grapes added to his bucket food.

**Watermelon (rind and pulp)** – This sweet melon is related botanically to cucumbers and squash, which are incidentally fruits, not vegetables. Watermelon is high in natural sugars and may not be a good choice for Insulin Resistant or laminitis-prone horses.

**Pumpkin** – Being that pumpkin is in the squash family, many feed their horses pumpkin and other squashes at Halloween and Thanksgiving time.
**Oranges, Tangerines, and Grapefruit** – All are full of vitamin C. Citrus fruits are a good source of minerals such as calcium, iron, sodium, copper, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium and sulfur. The white part of the skins has naturally occurring rutin, which is great for hoof health and for the small capillaries in the hooves.

**Mangoes & Papayas** – Mango is a good source of minerals such as copper and potassium. It contains traces of magnesium, manganese, selenium, calcium, iron, and phosphorus. Papayas contain large amounts of antioxidants and folate. Papayas are the source for an enzyme called papain, which aids digestion and is used as a meat tenderizer.

**Pears** – The pear is an excellent source of copper, manganese, potassium, magnesium, and selenium, and contains traces of calcium, phosphorous, and zinc. They are also a very good source of vitamin E, niacin (B3) and riboflavin (B2). It also contains small amounts of vitamin B6. Pears also have abundant levels of vitamin C and vitamin K. This is one fruit none of my horses have ever liked - I am not sure why, since many adore them. By the way, seeds in pears and apples are fine for horses to eat.

**Pomegranates** – This unique fruit contains polyphenols and tannins, and its juice has higher levels of antioxidants than red wine and green tea. I have seen horses eat the skin and all of fresh pomegranates that their owners had cut open for them.

Remember, each horse has his own individual tastes. Some horses will turn their noses up at some fruits, so you will have to do a few taste tests to see which fruits your horse may enjoy. Each is an individual and will have certain preferences. Just feed a couple of different fruits at a time so as not to overwhelm him. Consider making a smoothie of the fruits that your horse likes and adding it to his bucket food for a great taste treat!

Of my three horses, Echo and Cheyanne can either take or leave watermelon. They will eat just the red pulp or leave the whole piece just sitting, but Destinee will eat it all. All my horses say, “Bring on the blackberries and raspberries, fresh from the garden!” These make them really happy.

On occasion they enjoy a slice of papaya; Cheyanne enjoys grapes, Echo loves any kind of apples, and Destinee loves nectarines and McIntosh apples, so they have their own favorites. I offer up bananas on occasion and they try to be polite about them, but I can tell these are not a favorite of my herd!

So whatever the season, be adventurous - try new things, feed some fresh fruit such as peaches, nectarines, plums and watermelon, in thin slices (not in large chunks), and add a few berries and some grapes, and see what your horse picks out first as his favorite.

Slice up some oranges or grapefruit and a piece of mango. Don’t forget to remove the pits from apricots, peaches, plums, nectarines, cherries, etc. because they contain cyanide in small amounts and those pits are very toxic - and hard!

Don’t be too disappointed if your horse only likes a couple of the seasonal fruits you may offer him, and is just as happy with an apple or carrot, as that is a far healthier treat than a sugary mint or horse cookie. Try different types of apples if that is the fruit of choice; there are so many kinds now, including Gala, McIntosh, Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, Granny Smith, etc., each with its own distinct flavor.

Please feed these fruits in only very small amounts and remember that moderation is the key. When I make up a horse fruit salad I am making it for 3 horses so each gets a thin slice of cantaloupe, a slice of watermelon, some berries, sliced apple, a slice of orange, some slices of peach, apricot, nectarine, and maybe a little papaya, a few grapes, and what may be getting too ripe in the kitchen. Don’t feed your horse any fruit with any hint of mold on it!

Please note: If you have an insulin resistant or Cushing’s horse, only a “taste” of a few of these would be recommended, as many fruits are high in sugars, including citrus, grapes and watermelons.

**Unsafe Fruits** – Avocados, tomatoes, persimmons and rhubarb

When in doubt do not offer it. But do try adding some new tastes and nutritional options to your horse’s menu by sensibly offering a variety of fresh fruits on the side, especially in seasons when they are readily abundant.

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**About the author:**
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