

New View 11 Feb 1982

'Good horsekeeping' essential for

Desert Foothills living has a variety of allures. For many, prime attractions are corral privileges and ample space for horseback riding. The combination of horse, beautiful open terrain and a riding enthusiast are harmonious. The history and heritage of this area is enriched with the teamwork of equus and homosapien. Many remnants of trails, tracks and stockpens from Indian, miner, rancher, homesteader, military, dude rancher and rental string days remain visible and usable.

Adventure astride one's steed beckons outside the corral gate. But, what about that corral and its inhabitant? It is presumed every horse-home owner desires the best for both his land and animal. Both, however, can be abused without some thought and work toward desert good horsekeeping.

Corral location is a first consideration. In unincorporated areas, the county planning and zoning regulations state the barn 2 corral be constructed in the rear yard, not less than 40 feet from each property line with 1,200 feet allowed per horse. In rural (R-70 through R-190) zoning guidelines are less distinct and much is left to the judgement of the property owner. When applicable, subdivision-development deeds and restrictions should be consulted. In every instance, a healthy dose of common sense lavishly sprinkled with consideration and respect for the land, horse and neighbors needs to be applied.

In addition to activity on the trails, outside



of the gate, to stay in healthy physical condition, a horse needs well-balanced nutrition (preferably in a container off of the ground), abundant, clean drinking water, protection and relief from insects and the elements, and a large enough, fairly level, safely-enclosed space to allow self-exercise and escape from standing in manure.

The big trick is to find the location that meets as many of the horse's requirements in combination with the best compromises to the land and people. Regardless of where the barn/corral are located, most of the natural vegetation is doomed from nibbling and the hoof printed ground will be vulnerable to rain and wind erosion.

Since the area will be sacrificed, choose one with the least desert trees, ocotillos, jojobas and saguaros. To enclose large palo verde trees, mesquite or ironwood trees to provide shade for the horse is a lost cause. While enjoying the shade, the horse will also enjoy munching the tree. Soon, the foliage and bark is stripped as high as teeth can be

stretched.

The palo verde is especially vulnerable. Its green trunk and branches are drought-adapted to perform transpiration and photosynthesis. When the tree's outer bark is stripped away, it cannot survive, and only the skeleton remains. Dead-tree skeletons are not attractive and provide no shade.

Unfortunately, because of their long tap roots, desert trees and shrubs do not transplant successfully. Ocotillos and most cacti (if not too large) can be relocated with care. To save the trees, if possible, keep them on the outside of the corral — surround them with a protective barrier.

Brushing creosote on the branches is time consuming and an ineffective solution. The horse is adept at finding any spot that is missed and as creosote loses potency with time and weather, re-application never ends.

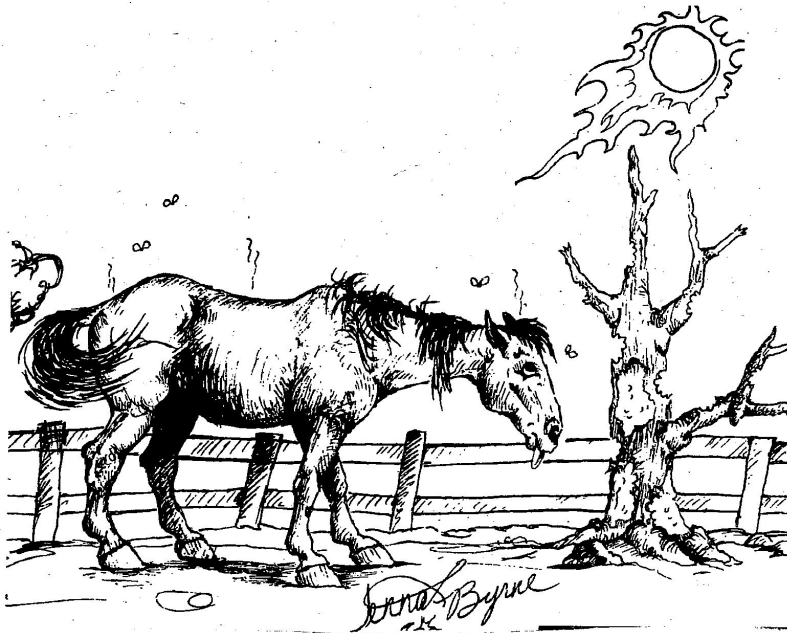
Avoid grades, steep slopes and large washes. With the brush munched and the ground both churned and compacted by hoofs, rain runoff is unchecked and can be fierce. Gullies erode with amazing rapidity and all debris left by the horse's presence (plant and manure) can be carried downstream perhaps to be deposited in a less-than-enchanted neighbor's back yard wash. Try to channel natural runoff courses with ditches and rock barriers.

The greater the number of horses in a single corral, the greater the disruption. Several animals are capable of diversely affecting the character and channel of a wash-bed.

During the hot, dry months a corral can become a mini-dust bowl at the whims of a brisk wind or a maverick "dust devil." Again, the hoof-pulverized, powdery topsoil and manure is moved, this time into the air. Usually the prevailing breeze is from the southwest. Place the corral downwind from the house. Trees around the corral's perimeter can serve as an attractive wind-break as well as providing shade.

For both the good health of the horse and the owner and the goodwill of neighbors, keep a clean, sanitary corral. Accumulated manure can be a multiple menace. Manure attracts and provides a breeding ground for flies.

Flies not only harass people and horses with biting, but also increase disease-



stableowners

spreading potential. Flies are directly responsible for a variety of parasites within a horse's system. Parasitic blockage and damage to the digestive and circulatory system is one of the main causes of colic. The parasitic life-cycle is perpetuated through flies, host and manure. Horses ingest the fly eggs from either licking (scratching) their leg hair or from contaminated dried manure and eating off the ground. Screwworm flies deposit their eggs in the animal's open wound. When hatched, the larvae feed on the flesh and can cause serious tissue damage.

Accumulated manure can smell foul, especially when soaked with rain or urine. If a horse cannot escape the ooze the soles of his hooves are candidates for thrush and maggots, and he can go lame.

Preventive maintenance is the key. An active shovel and wheelbarrow, safe "wipes" applied directly on the horse, and "Big Stinky-type" fly traps around the barn area, can help diminish the fly problem. Beware of the highly-poisonous air-borne fly sprays — they can kill beneficial insects and birds as well.

Out of the corral, dried, aged and pulverized horse manure can serve as humus. Worked into hard earth, horse manure improves soil drainage and supplies nutrients for gardens and plants.

Be aware that not only can a horse destroy relatively desirable native vegetation within the corral, but also his feed can be the transporter for undesirable nuisance weed seeds. Some of these foreign offenders are Russian thistle (tumbleweed), milkweed, ragweed, sticky fiddle-neck and a variety of grasses such as foxtail. Once established, these intruders tend to usurp the natives and are difficult to eliminate. Hoe the bad guys before the flowers go to seed. Choose the least weed-contaminated hay available. Clean hay also gives less waste and better nutritional value.

Just as an attractive desert home blends with its natural surroundings, so should the same aesthetic consideration be given to a barn and corral. The horse won't care, but probably the owner and the neighbors do.

Sheltered plantings and neat, maintained construction with paint applied, (dark browns and grey-green seem to be the least obtrusive) can make the barn an asset to one's overall property appearance.

May these suggestions, many learned by this writer through hindsight and trial-and-error experience, be beneficial to happier, healthier and more attractive horsekeeping to Foothills horse owners — both old-timers and new-comers. Saddle up and enjoy the ride.
