

Should horses wear rugs?

By Chloe Gregory

Living Out

A horse which lives out in the field – like in the wild - doesn't need a rug or much grooming in Winter. This is because his natural shaggy, fluffy winter coat contains layers of air and grease, which keep him warm. Provided he has been allowed to grow it, this is the best winter coat he could ever have because it's waterproof, thick and yet can still breathe.

Keep grooming to a minimum in Winter. Lightly brush the worst of the mud off him when you want to exercise him with a big widely spaced brush like a Dandy brush. A close-set haired brush like a body brush might make him look smarter, but it will only remove the important grease that keeps him warm. As the weather warms in spring, grooming can be more thorough to help him shift that moulting coat.

Generally speaking (exceptions no doubt sometimes apply) horses which live out do not need to wear rugs. This is because the more they are rugged up, the less of their natural winter coat they will grow. But they should wear a rug if they have sweet-itch, or otherwise their fur will be far more thin. They should only wear a fly rug in the Spring/Summer.



Rugs should be kept off outdoors, to keep the horse's natural temperature balance the same. If not, the horse's heat will become reliant from the rugs at all times, year after year.

Living indoors

Rugs are put on stabled, living-in horses whenever they're not working, or whenever they've a few hours out in the field, because the owner wishes to stop the winter coat from growing. Why? Because he wants to work his horse - in dressage, show-jumping, or some other high level training that is physically demanding of the horse - and it is not fair to ask a horse to work while he's wearing a great shaggy winter coat. It would be like a human running a marathon whilst wearing a heavy wool-lined sheep-skin coat.



Rugging-up begins sometimes as early as August - in order to stop their winter coat growing through which starts as the late summer / autumn nights begin to draw in. The rug provides heat, and because they don't

feel the cold as they normally would, their body tells them they don't need to grow a winter coat.

Not only for that reason, but rugs are put on the indoor horses because most of the times they have been clipped. In this case, they do need rugs because they do not have their normal thick winter coat.