

Steering Clear of Spreaders that Stink

How equine owners can choose a manure spreader that fits the bill

by Dennis Skibo



Equine owners know that manure builds up quickly—about 50 pounds per day for a single horse. To avoid costly off-site hauling, manure spreading is a practical option.

Not all spreaders are created equal, but likewise, all horse owners are different. Spreader needs depend on the number of horses owned, where they are stabled, size and number of pastures available for spreading, climate, and terrain. Regardless, there are certain features and specifications desirable for any spreader. Being knowledgeable goes hand in hand with identifying the ideal equipment to save horse owners time and money.

First Things First

Power Source

Equine owners can select from two main power options: ground drive and power take-off (PTO). Ground drive spreaders use power generated by their turning wheels to move parts of the spreader. PTO spreaders connect to a tractor and use its power to break down the manure.



Ground drive spreaders are suitable for a buyer with one or two horses. They can be pulled by a variety of machines, including ATVs, RTVs and pick-up trucks, so no tractor is necessary. Although it's as simple as "hook and go," be careful—some models can throw manure on the operator when reversing.

PTO spreaders are larger and preferred for higher volumes of manure. Keep in mind the tractor that you plan to use, as different

spreaders may have different horsepower (hp) requirements—no pun intended. Also, garden tractors may not have PTO capability, but there are spreader models designed to adapt to such tractors. Most manufacturers list minimum requirements with product specifications, so make sure you have the right equipment to make it work.

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Box/Capacity

Users load manure into the box for spreading. The box's size impacts capacity, measured in bushels. Number of horses will guide owners to a suitable spreader size. An equine owner with one or two horses may do fine with a 25- or 50-bushel spreader, depending on how often they want to spread manure. If someone boards four horses and only wants to spread once a week, it makes more sense to opt for an 80-bushel box.

Consider box width. A spreader should be narrow enough to fit down the aisle of a barn and leave enough room for loading. Look for a comfortable loading height—lifting manure too high into the box can be a back breaker.

Beaters

These paddles located at the back/bottom of a spreader are responsible for breaking down manure for spreading and dispersing it over a certain size area (called spread pattern). Generally

made of steel, the beater shaft and the paddles themselves should be thick to avoid bending and breaking. This is especially important in the winter when frozen manure can lead to costly repairs. Look for spreaders with replaceable individual beaters to minimize repair and maintenance costs



For the Long Haul

Apron Chain

The apron chain acts like a conveyor, moving manure from the spreader's box to the beaters for dispersion. The chain is a common source of maintenance issues. T-rod chains have a longer life than traditional links, decreasing maintenance costs and unexpected downtime. T-rod chains also allow for easy replacement of individual links, instead of spending up to \$600 for an entire chain.



Flooring

Buyers should avoid wood flooring, even when treated or covered with a vinyl laminate. Wood rots and freezes. Instead, savvy buyers should choose solid polyvinyl flooring. It reduces maintenance, and some manufacturers guarantee the material for the life of a spreader.

Price

As with most equipment, horse owners will get what they pay for. To have a buying advantage, they need to do their homework, see how different products match up, and look to local dealers and manufacturers to help them find the right spreader. But beware: despite the temptation of lower price, buyers shouldn't underestimate the value of solid construction. A spreader with welded construction fights corrosion better than equipment simply bolted together. Buying on price alone could leave them down in the dumps—literally.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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