



How to Get Started in a 4-H Horse Project

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Welcome to an exploration of the 4-H horse project. This project can be a lot of fun, and it certainly involves a wide range of activities and opportunities. Hopefully, this fact sheet will help you determine whether the 4-H horse project might be right for you. The mission of 4-H Youth Development programs is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge and developing life skills that will be with them as they become adults. As the 4-H member is taught technical subject matter about horses, life skills become part of the process. Life skills include building positive relationships with people, communication, decision-making and problem solving, managing resources, and interacting in groups. Not only do members learn about horses, they better understand themselves.

Who is Eligible?

4-H is the youth development program of UNH Cooperative Extension. It is an informal educational program offered free of charge to youth ages 5-18 from all economic and cultural backgrounds. Although they are participants, youth 5-7 do not participate in projects involving large animals. Members and volunteers live in towns, cities, farms, and suburbs.

Often it is believed a 4-H member must live on a farm to have an animal project. Actually, more and more 4-H youth are from non-farm backgrounds. Animals can be owned or leased and kept nearby if necessary. Leasing avoids the initial cost of the animal and allows the member to use and care for the animal on a yearly basis.

An official lease agreement is available from, and filed with, the 4-H office and the horse's owner continues to own the animal. The 4-H member has the benefit of providing a minimum of 50 percent of the care of the animal and exhibiting the animal as if it were their own. It also provides the flexibility of participating for a year and then discontinuing if a decision is made to switch to another project area.

It is important to remember that owning or leasing a horse is a large responsibility. In owning or leasing, you make a commitment to provide the care the horse needs on a constant basis.

Horses need to eat twice a day, 365 days a year. Horse chores must be done on Christmas and on your birthday. You can never put horse care off until another day. You may participate in a 4-H horse project if you do not own or lease an animal. In this case, the member learns about equine (horse) science and may participate in all unmounted 4-H horse opportunities such as quiz bowl, judging, demonstrations, and more.

Important Note: The 4-H horse project is not a riding instruction program and riding lessons are not part of the standard 4-H curriculum.

How to Start

Call the UNH Cooperative Extension office in your county. Talk to your county 4-H Youth Development Educator and explain your interests and the town you are from. Within each county there are clubs offered either by town or by project. You might be referred to a county horse club, or to a club that offers a variety of projects.

The 4-H office can put you in contact with local leaders in charge of the 4-H club nearest you. A 4-H member may also carry the project as an independent member or as part of a family club. Independent members work with an adult to complete project work. Family clubs function as a 4-H club but involve one family rather than youth from many families. All members focus on citizenship, leadership and service as well as project goals.

The 4-H program emphasizes family involvement. As you think about joining a horse project, the whole family should think about the commitment and time it takes to have a positive experience.

Club meetings may occur one or two times per month. There are also special clinics and activities, plus animal ownership and care requires work every day. Parents are encouraged to assist clubs with transportation, supplying refreshments, or serving as chaperones.

If you do not anticipate this, it can take you by surprise, but with pre-planning 4-H can be an integral part of your family fun. Families are often strengthened as the whole family learns and works together through 4-H.

When Is a Good Time to Start?

The 4-H year follows the school year. During summer months, many clubs are less structured and focus more on exhibit or camping opportunities. Most clubs accept new members in the fall to take advantage of the structured activities held at that time. Contact your county Extension educator for details on joining 4-H in your county. Some horse shows or classes may be limited to 4-H members only. For a 4-H member to participate in these events they must have their animal owned or leased, in their name only, and registered with the county 4-H office, prior to May 1. Youth 12 and over who wish to represent New Hampshire in the 4-H show at Eastern States Exposition must have their animals owned or leased and registered with the county 4-H office prior to April 1.

In this way, youth are exhibiting the results of their personal project work with their 4-H animal. Providing a base date also allows time for youth to become familiar with the management of their animal and with control of the animal when mounted.

4-H Horse Activities

4-H members in the horse project participate in local club meetings where a lot of information about horses is learned. 4-H members may participate in demonstrations, public speaking, horse judging, horse quiz bowl, hippology, and 4-H horse shows.

Participation and practice begin at the club level. As the 4-H member gains skill and confidence, he or she may progress to participation at the county and state levels. There are also 4-H horse events held regionally and nationally, but everything begins in the local club or 4-H unit.

What Breed Should I Choose?

Selecting a horse is a matter of personal choice. There are no specific breeds recommended for 4-H project animals. Keep in mind stallions are not permitted in 4-H shows; some shows do not permit nursing mares.

Draft horses and ponies as well as mules and donkeys are suitable for fitting and showmanship, but their suitability in mounted classes may vary. There is a small equine division that might fit the smaller size animals.

Basic Facilities

All you need to know about horse facilities cannot be described in this small space, but the following provides you with information to get your planning started if you are going to house your horse on your own property:

1. Check the zoning laws to be sure horses are permitted.
2. Provide adequate housing. The area should be clean, dry, and free from drafts, with adequate sunlight and ventilation. A full size horse needs a mini-mum of a 10x10 foot stall and a 10x12 is highly preferred.
3. Allow space for handling feeds and equipment as well as for properly handling manure. Manure handling is very important and may be regulated by your community
4. Plan for adequate utilities. Horses must have access to water. Electricity will be helpful for lighting, using clippers, etc.
5. Provide an adequate exercise area. If possible, it is nice to have access to a fenced area where your horse can exercise; fencing will be another consideration.
6. Basic facility costs:

Fenced Paddock 50'x50' (200 sq. ft. @ \$5 per foot)	\$1000
Shed 10'x12' (120 sq. ft. @ \$6 per foot)	\$ 720
Storage 8'x10' (80 sq. ft. @\$8 per foot)	\$ 640
Facilities Total	\$2600

Equipment to Get Started

There are many miscellaneous pieces of equipment on the market. Some items can be obtained second hand. Here is a list of the basic horse care equipment:

Saddle	\$200
Bridle	\$60
Pad	\$30
Halter	\$20
Lead Rope	\$8
Curry Comb	\$4
Hoof Pick	\$1
Brush	\$5
Buckets	\$35
Stall Cleaning	\$ 0 (if you clean stall yourself)
Materials	\$35
Veterinary Kit	\$30

Total Costs: \$428

Estimated costs of caring for a horse for a year (based on a 1,000 pound average riding horse kept in the back yard (not trailered frequently or shown) as of 2010:

Hay	\$647-\$1202	(185 bales per year: \$647 in-field, \$925 at farm, \$1202 feed store)
Grain	\$468	(5 pounds per day)
Foot Trimming	\$250-\$275	(no shoes)
Standard Shoes	\$600-\$750	
Veterinary Care*	\$300	(basic, with no accidents)
Bedding	\$150-\$850	(\$150 per year for run-in sheds; up to \$850 for a well-bedded and changed stall)
Supplements	0	(may not be necessary)
Total	\$2415-3545	

It is important to know all costs listed here are approximate values. There are always unanticipated and incidental costs associated with animal ownership. You can cut your initial investment in tack and equipment by participating in equipment swaps and used tack and clothing sales. Quality used equipment is frequently available.

*Veterinarians recommend vaccines for Tetanus, Rabies, EEE, West Nile, and Equine Herpes virus for all horses.

Summary

A 4-H horse project is a big commitment, but it pays big dividends. 4-H members who care for animals learn about and practice decision making, responsibility, record keeping, and time management.

Youth who take advantage of 4-H opportunities develop good communication skills as well as leadership skills. As you enroll in the project, be sure your whole family is ready for the commitment and has counted the costs.

The horse project is more than caring for a horse; it is a project which builds skills that carry through a lifetime.

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