

WINTER PIG FEEDING AND CARE

MARRIAGE'S

Just as they face problems at the height of summer, pigs will also need particular care in the depths of winter. As always, regular checks are essential, but certain issues can be considered in advance.

Providing clean fresh water is essential for your pigs, galvanised troughs are robust and easy to clean, and not too easy for the pigs to tip over. During the winter months even a thin layer of ice on the top of water troughs will be enough to prevent pigs from getting their daily intake of water. Always check water troughs in the morning and, on very cold days, in the evening too. Similarly, wet conditions followed by minus temperatures can lead to frozen, rutted ground. If the pigs have nowhere level to move to from time to time, they are likely to go lame. It is obviously much easier to prevent lameness than cure it, so ensure that outdoor pigs have access to some level, sheltered space, away from the winter conditions.

Pigs need a balanced diet of appropriate levels of fibre, energy, protein, vitamins and minerals to thrive. Feed will be your largest expenditure in keeping pigs, so it pays to get it right. Many pig feeds now contain genetically modified ingredients. If this is something that you wish to avoid there are feed mills producing non-GM or Organic feeds. Check the declaration label on the bag carefully, if an ingredient is genetically modified it legally must be labelled as such. Pigs tend to eat more in the winter so ordering or buying feed at the last minute can be risky, as your supplier may have low stock, so always make sure you have enough feed stored at home.

It is important that your feed is stored correctly all year round. The environment is essential feed should be stored in a dry cool place. Many feed bags are stitched closed which is a very effective strong closure, however it is important to keep them dry and clean as mould spores can grow within the stitching and contaminate the feed. Once a feed bag has been opened it should be stored correctly in an air tight lidded bin/container, ensuring that bins/containers are empty, clean and dry before tipping new feed in. Old feed left in the bottom of the bin will create an ideal breeding ground for bacteria and mould. Spillages of feed should be cleared up quickly and effectively to prevent attracting vermin or creating a slip hazard.

If you have several bags of feed ensure that you check the 'best before' dates and use the closest date's first, rotating stock as it comes in. The 'best before' date is an indication of the nutritional integrity of the feed if stored correctly. It does not provide a guarantee that the food will still be fit to feed after a period of time if it has been incorrectly stored.

The production of animal feed is subject to strict legislation and all reputable feed manufacturers should belong to UFAS (Universal Feed Assurance Scheme). UFAS strictly audits ingredients and production methods used by feed producers, to ensure they are of a certain standard.





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(continued)

If outdoor runs become boggy, it is better to feed in troughs. Make sure that each pig has enough space to feed, as to avoid fighting. If you must feed on the ground, then sow rolls, rather than cubes are better. They tend to be anywhere up to three times the size, so are not so easily lost in the mud.

For growing pigs of traditional breeds, weaned at 8-12 weeks, consider feeding a pound per day for every month they are old. For example, three months old (12-16 weeks) would mean 3lbs per day and so on. Stop increasing daily rations after five months. Piglet's requirements will depend on the age at which they are weaned. If weaning early or where the sow is unable to provide enough milk a creep diet should be provided. For pigs intended for slaughter growers diets need to be chosen carefully depending on age as feeding an early stage grower for too long can lead to excess fat at slaughter particularly in traditional breeds. With sows, it is best to feed morning and evening when it is cold. Dry sows may need approximately 2lbs of sow feed per day; lactating sows can be fed ad-lib. For pet pigs you need to ensure that you are feeding according to body condition as they can become overweight easily which can lead to health issues. Pet pigs including micro pigs, kune kune and potbellied pigs are best suited to specific maintenance diet.

Fruit and Vegetables can be fed but they may not be as readily available as in the summer or autumn. Make absolutely sure that you do not feed any meat products to the pigs. Veg can provide entertainment and help to relieve boredom during the winter months. Arks should be kept dry, free from drafts and well littered with straw to ensure your pigs are kept warm enough especially on cold winters nights. How you position your ark should be taken into consideration. If your ark is placed facing away from the wind it will prevent drafts and help to eliminate the potential for respiratory disease. If your pigs are warm in there ark it can also help to avoid dunging in the laying area. Routinely checking your ark for damage, will help to keep it in order and prevent the rain and wind getting in. Perimeter fencing can also deteriorate in the winter months so regular checks are important to prevent escapees and eliminate the risk of pigs becoming trapped and injured.

There are many different supplements available on the market for pigs a popular choice is palatable feed licks. These complement and balance diets by helping to correct nutrient deficiencies, they also improve forage digestibility, stimulate forage intakes and improve animal health and performance. Feed licks are usually waterproof and suitable for outdoor use but you may wish to place the lick within a trough so it does not become submerged within mud and spoil. Ensure that you select the correct lick that is suitable for pigs as ones designed for other animals could be harmful.

For more information on feeding your pigs call us on **01245 612019**.