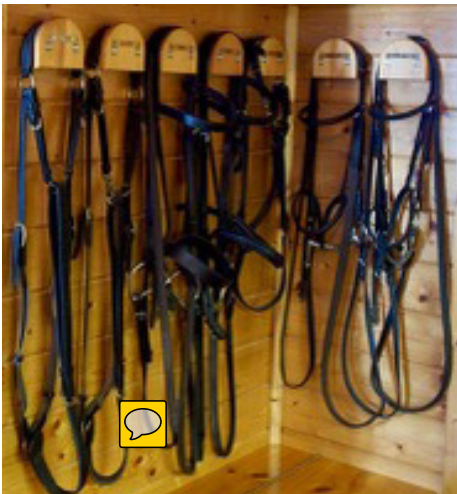


Get Organized Like A Pro

By Kate Selby



A well-kept entrance with great “curb appeal.” Photo courtesy of Bay Blue Farm/Jennifer Nicoletta, ARIA certified instructor.



First impressions are important. Curb appeal is a term realtors use for what prospective customers will see when they first drive up to a property. Are the fences tidy? Is the grass mowed, and the yard raked? Or is there manure lying around, old tools rusting, or building supplies laying in a pile?

What people see as they approach the outside will give them an idea what to expect on the inside.

Additions like flowers or a fresh coat of paint are nice, but you can keep things looking great while spending little or no money.

As a professional horse person, you work hard to teach your students, train your horses, and make sure all are happy, healthy, and safe. Customers should see the same level of dedication reflected in the space in which you work—the barn.

Keeping things organized not only looks good, having supplies and equipment out of the aisle and off the floor makes a safer environment for both horses and riders. Even an old barn looks great if everything is put away, stalls picked, and aisles clean—in short, professional! This guide will help you bring your facility to a new level.

Tack room

In your tack room, everyday items such as grooming tools, bridles, saddles and pads should be clearly labeled for each horse and kept easily accessible. Hang or shelf occasionally-used things like lunging equipment and auxiliary aids where they are accessible, but not in the heavy use areas. Create a tack cleaning area, with shelves for cleaning supplies, easy access to water, and a place to hang wet rags. Have a sturdy saddle rack and hanging hook for strap goods nearby.

Most horse people have extra pieces of everything. Go through your spare items, and cull, cull, cull. You don't need a spare halter, lead, and set of reins for every horse. You need them in case something

else breaks to use *temporarily* until the broken item is repaired or replaced. If you have a collection of bits, label their size, and put them away. The same goes for extra reins and leathers.

Remember to store all equipment clean and dry. Leather goods should be well-oiled and wrapped in linen to prevent mildew. Spare stuff comes in handy, but seldom-used items do not need to be within easy reach—high shelves, attics, or storage closets are good for this.

Each horse should have its own set of grooming tools. Once each season, toss everything (brushes, currys, picks, shedding blades, totes) into a clean wheelbarrow with soapy water and a dash of



Clear, clean aisles are safe as well as appealing! Photo courtesy of Bay Blue Farm/Jennifer Nicolella, ARIA certified instructor.

bleach. (Or you can use your dishwasher—it’s great for bits, too!) Swish the contents around every so often. After at least an hour, remove everything from the water and set out in the sun to dry. You now have cleaned the tools *and* the wheelbarrow!

Soft gear

Keep splint, bell, and galloping boots separate from other items. Try an old laundry basket that lets air circulate freely. Rinse or brush off boots after use and dry them before storing them as pairs.

Wraps are another opportunity to cull. The chances of needing to wrap every horse in your barn at the same time are slim, so keep just a few full sets of each type, including quilts.

Have a cabinet or box just for clean pads, and maybe even one for squares and one for shaped pads. Avoid leaving piles of pads on top of saddles. Have out only what’s being currently used. When one is dirty, put it in the laundry basket, and get out a clean one. If a pad is damp, dry it completely and either put in the laundry or refold and store.

Blankets

Blankets change with the seasons. Make sure you only keep out what is “in season.”



Everything in its place: cubbies above hold boots, wraps, and supplies, while cupboards below are the perfect size for saddle pads. Photo courtesy of Little Ardon Farm, Vermont.

During the summer, you might have a fly sheet and mask, cooler, and a rain sheet. As the weather cools off, you might add a medium weight turn-out, then a heavy-weight, and perhaps a stable blanket or two. In the fall, wash and put away all fly masks, sheets, and lightweight items you won’t need for months.

Come spring, it’s time to get blankets washed, repaired, and stored away.

To hang or fold? Blankets are tricky because of bulk. Have enough space to hang them so they can dry. Portable tack racks are great—lots of sturdy hooks, and they can easily be put away when the season is over. If you fold for stall door storage, fold the chest in, pull straps in, then fold once top to bottom, and once front to back.

Bulk grain: You may save money buying in bulk, but if it isn't used up quickly, even grain stored in metal containers can spoil before you use it. Choose health over savings.

Toxins—including rodenticides, cleansers, and disinfectants. Store away from general use areas, in a cupboard or container that closes and latches, or better yet, locks.

Label the outside of containers with the type of blankets, size, and the horse they last fit.

If seasonal clothing gets washed and checked for repairs, then stored, you'll be making space for the new season's attire while at the same time reducing barn clutter and preparing for next year.

Medical Supplies

For a human first aid kit, all you need is a medium waterproof container with things such as band-aids, ibuprofen, scissors and tweezers, some gauze, tape, and first aid cream. If someone in your barn has special medical needs (e.g., allergies or asthma), consider having the client provide you with a physician-approved kit for them. The container should close tightly, be clearly labeled, and placed where it's readily accessible to anyone who may need it.

For equine first aid, sort supplies by type and frequency of use. If possible, have separate shelves for medications, health products, and general supplies. Go through your stock regularly, discard out of date items, and make a list of things to replenish.

Keep products for cleaning and dressing minor wounds easy to get to, as they are the most frequently used. Less often used supplies can be less accessible. This list might include vet wrap, diapers, easy boots, duct tape, bandages, gauze, cotton, needles and syringes, and shampoos and conditioners.

While basic first aid needs should be easy to access, medications and drugs should not. Always keep all items that could be toxic to pets or young visitors safely closed up and out of reach. Do the same for general health supplies like dewormers, vac-



Caption for above photo to go here.

cines, and supplements. Take inventory regularly, keep things organized, and keep up with the shopping. The item you are out of today is guaranteed to be the one you'll need tomorrow.

Feed

For grain, I'm a fan of the can. Galvanized aluminum, that is. The square plastic ones save space, but rodents can and will chew through them. Each can should have a tight fitting lid. If you have a grain bin, make sure it is metal-lined and latches securely when closed, so rodents can't get in. For cleaning, either leave the grain in the bags so the bin can easily be emptied, or let the bin get completely empty at least twice a month for a good cleaning.

Have on hand only what you use regularly. Your goal is to have an adequate supply of fresh grain.

Smartpak wrote the book on supplements, but if you don't use them, use sealable baggies clearly labeled for each horse and meal, and have each horse's baggies in their own closeable container. A collection of ten different jars and tubs in the feed area is unsightly, confusing, and wasteful.

If you have a hay loft, throw down only what you need for a few days. If you have separate hay storage, make a space in the

barn for a few days' worth so you aren't running to fetch hay every day. Clean up hay waste in the aisle and your stalls regularly to prevent it becoming home to pests, and to prevent mold and dust from building up. Storage is kept at a maximum if you aren't standing on 6" of old hay. Moldy hay should be disposed of with your manure, or in its own compost area where horses can't get at it. Pick up twine and throw it out. Save a few pieces with your barn tools, as it does come in handy, but there will always be more where that came from.

Wheelbarrows, forks, shovels, brooms, muck tubs, and water and feed buckets are the tools of our trade, and all are bulky items that are hard to store neatly. A separate room for this gear will keep your aisle free of hazards. Try to keep only what you need, plus a few spares. Holding onto broken buckets or forks "just in case" only leads to clutter. If you need a new bucket, get one, then put the old one into your spares pile, and throw away the worst one in that pile. Same for feed tubs, water buckets, grain pails, you name it.

If something is broken, fix it. If you can't, pass it on. Good things to save are fork handles with no heads or usable heads from broken handles, and buckets with missing handles to use safely in fields for feed.



Left: A high cabinet keeps medications out of reach for pest and children. Photo courtesy of Bay Blue Farm/Jennifer Nicolella, ARIA certified instructor.

Always have a toolbox. Hammer, pliers, vise grips, assorted screwdrivers, measuring tape, staple gun, mat knife, adjustable and socket wrenches for all gates/hinges, duct tape and grease—all are items you’ll reach for over and over again. You may also want to keep farriers tools like shoe pullers and a rasp. A saw and nails or screws to quickly replace broken boards should be with your tools.

Keep tools lightly oiled so they don’t rust, especially if stored in an unheated space. If you have power tools or battery operated ones, keep them in a relatively warm, dry place to help them last.

Designate a container for double-ended snaps, screw eyes, hangers, carabiners, etc. so you know where to look when one breaks, and can easily keep track of how many you have. Do the same for hose repair kits, spare light bulbs, extra nails, screws and staples.

Seasonal items

Here in northern Vermont we use hoses

and water tubs from late spring through early winter. Once the deep freeze hits, we switch to rubber five-gallon buckets (unless you have tanks with heaters).

The rubber buckets are flexible—they don’t crack if they freeze, and it is easy to bash the ice out. Come spring, clean and dry the rubber buckets and stack them out of the way for next winter. If you cleaned your tubs at the end of the summer before storing, you’ll have less to do the day you decide to switch things over; the new items will be clean and ready for use.

Getting started

If you aren’t sure where to begin, start with just one room—or even one shelf—sorting, organizing, cleaning and storing. Keeping items by use or type, and labeling containers with an inventory of the contents will go a long way to keeping your barn looking neat and organized.

Still unsure how to get started? Try asking someone else to look at your barn with “fresh eyes.” There are even professional barn organizers you can hire to help you get the job done.

You take pride in your horses, your students, and your business. A clean, well-organized barn reflects not only your professionalism, it also exemplifies what you

Space savers, safety makers:

- Hang as much as you can —shovels, forks, brooms, blowers, cords, etc. to save floor space.
- Use sturdy hanging hardware. Having things jumping off walls is not good.
- Flip wheel barrows up when not in use and keep them out of the aisle.
- Spare buckets—keep just a few sizes/shapes for easier stacking and storage.
- Avoid clutter in and around the wash stall.

expect from your students. You’ll enjoy a cleaner, calmer, safer space to work in, and you’ll be setting an example for generations of horsemen to come. ■

About the author:

Kate Selby is an ARIA Level III instructor in Dressage and Hunt Seat and winner of the ARIA Instructor of the Year. When she’s not teaching, coaching the Middlebury College Equestrian Team, or hunting the hounds for Green Mountain Hounds, she generally has her nose in a book. She lives on her farm in northern Vermont.