

Ask an Agent: Should I blanket my horse?

Caitlin Jackson

Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent

UGA Extension – Monroe County

Every year when the weather starts to get chilly I always get a few calls asking if and when owners should begin blanketing their horses. Horses are naturally equipped to deal with all the seasons, so the decision to blanket your horse should be based on their living environment and level of competitive activities.

It takes a healthy horse about 10-21 days of cold temperatures to develop a full winter coat. This thick layer of hair will adequately protect most horses from cold temperatures and wind. However, they might start to get cold if they are exposed to rain or freezing rain in addition to cold temperatures and wind. This is where their living environment comes into play when making a blanketing decision. Do your horses have access to a shelter where they can escape the elements? In general, horses can withstand two out of three extreme environmental conditions (cold temperatures, wind, and rain) but when exposed to all three may need a blanket. What exactly do I mean by cold temperatures? When the temperature drops below 5 degrees F or the wind chill is below 5 degrees F, which we may or may not experience in a Georgia winter. Keep an eye out on horses with body condition scores of three or less or very young or old horses as they will not have the same tolerance for winter weather as healthy horses.

One thing to really consider when blanketing is your competitive level during winter months. If you are actively showing and do not want your horse to grow a thick winter coat then blanketing is highly recommended to deter hair growth. You will also need to blanket if you have body clipped your horse. It is important that you have the correct blanket size for your horse as improperly fitted blankets will cause sores and rub marks. To correctly measure a horse for a blanket all you will need is a long measuring tap, a fabric measuring tape works best. Place the tape in the center of the horse's chest and wrap over the point of shoulder around to where you want the blanket to end, as some people prefer the tail portion to extend to the top of the horse's tail where others prefer the blanket to stop short of the tail. Before you put on a blanket always check for rips and that all the buckles and snaps are functional. You will also want to make sure that you are able to remove the blanket if temperatures rise so the horse does not sweat under their blanket.

Georgia certainly has some odd weather sometimes and that can be challenging when it comes to blanketing. Honestly, there is no "right" answer when it comes to the question "Should I blanket my horse?" as it just depends on your situation.