

Getting to know Sacrifice Areas

What is a sacrifice area?

A sacrifice area is a small enclosure which is designated to be an outdoor living area for your horses. It earned its name because you are giving up the use of that land as a grassy area to be a dirt lot that will benefit your pastures. The sacrifice area is most commonly to be used during the rain season, winter months, and when your pastures are in need of a resting period. A sacrifice area has many different layers of footing that help to promote drainage, and creates a good place for horses to live in these tough months.



Why you may want to look into having a sacrifice area of your own:

If you live in New England and find yourself running into some of these common problems, maybe a sacrifice area is a good choice for you! There are MANY benefits to adding a sacrifice area to your equine property and here are just a few.

WINTER MONTHS- Ice can come in many forms during the winter, but with all the added drainage of a sacrifice area, the amount of ice on the ground will be lessened, providing a safer place to keep horses during icy times.

CONT.

RAIN SEASON- The best reason to look into a sacrifice area, hands down, is for the use during wet seasons. Using a sacrifice area during the rain season will help to eliminate these common problems.

1. Putting horses out on wet pastures will ruin a pasture before you have the chance to graze it. Grazing on wet fields will turn the whole thing to mud and kill off any grass. Horses are tough on grass and loosen top soil which can lead to erosion.
2. MUD! It pulls our horse's shoes off and coats their legs. When horses are left standing in mud it increases their chances of having bacterial or fungal problems with their feet and on their legs.
3. Rain means runoff. Having horses on pasture during rain season means there will be a lot of runoff and this is something we should all work to lessen.



RESTING PASTURE- Sometimes our pastures can't always keep up with our grazing horses and require a rest period. Sacrifice areas allow you the space to do just that without putting any other grassy land at risk for over grazing.

RUN OFF- Sacrifice areas are designed to drain very well which means the amount of runoff is lessened. Sacrifice areas are also set up so that the drainage is directed to certain areas and can avoid running into water sources or other problem areas. A sacrifice lot confines waste to a smaller area allowing for easier removal compared to a large pasture.



• Also a great area to use as a med paddock or to help horses transition to being on grass.

Is this a good choice for your farm?

The planning

When thinking about adding a sacrifice area to your property there is a little planning to be done!

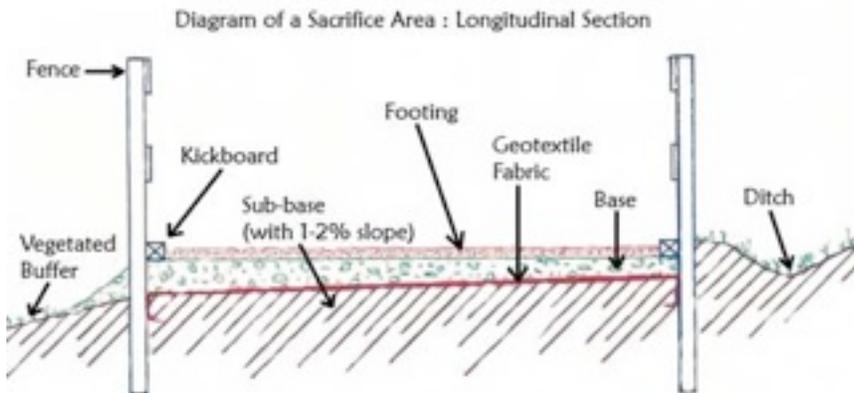
Firstly, where do you want it? You want a sacrifice area to be close enough to the barn that it is convenient to maintain, and to take care of the horses. Also think about putting it on high ground and away from any water sources.

Second, how big do you want it? This is really dependent on personal preference and use but they can be the size of a stall to a size where the horse could trot around. Just make sure you have the amount of land set aside for the desired use.

Installing

When installing a sacrifice area, gutters should be added to any sheds in a sacrifice area to direct water away from this area.

This diagram shows the different layers of the sacrifice area-



• <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/newsletter/sacrificearea.htm>

For more information about what footing to use in a sacrifice area here is a great website to visit- <https://ag.umass.edu/fact-sheets/footing-materials-for-sacrifice-areas>

Use and management of sacrifice area

A sacrifice area, just like anything else on a farm, must be maintained in order to work to its full potential and have a long lasting life.



It is best to try and maintain a small area of grass on any downward slope of a sacrifice area as this will act as a back up and catch any extra run off.

Manure, old bedding, and old hay should be removed from a sacrifice area daily and if not, regularly. The area should also always be cleaned before rain, or snow. Picking up manure daily will help reduce flies, parasites, and prevent runoff being contaminated by manure.

A sacrifice area may require an added layer of top footing after two or three years to ensure proper drainage and footing amounts.

For more information on sacrifice areas visit the listed sources bellow. Sources-

- <https://ag.umass.edu/fact-sheets/footing-materials-for-sacrifice-areas>
- <http://animalscience.uconn.edu/extension/publications/pastplantseedsac.htm>
- http://www.kingcd.org/pub_mud_cre.htm
- <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/newsletter/sacrificearea.htm>