

## 12 Tips When Shopping for Horse Property

*Are you truly ready to have a horse or two at home? Doing your homework up front will save money, time and frustration later. Use this handy 12-point checklist to determine whether your dream property will actually be a dream-come-true or a nightmare!*

### □ Ready to be a Farmer?

Assess whether you (and your family) are truly ready for the job of horse, and horse-property management. Having your horse at home means that YOU will be totally responsible for your horse's well-being, and must be committed to the 24/7 job of horse and horse property management!

### □ Check Soils

Choose an appropriate soil type. Look for dry, well-drained soils for building, confinement areas, arenas and other structures. For pastures, soils like sandy loam that have a fair amount of organic matter in them are best. Soils that do not drain well, like clay, or that have too little nutrients, like rocky soils, are not good candidates for productive horse pastures. To get information on the soils of your prospective property, consult the easy-to-use USDA Web Soil Survey on the Internet: <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov> or contact the Snohomish Conservation District at 425-335-5634, ext 4.

### □ Existing Vegetation

Survey the existing vegetation in and around pastures to help you determine conditions on the property. Wetlands plants (sedges and rushes) tell you that soils in an area may be boggy. Other plants, such as buttercup and dock,

can indicate compaction. Scot's Broom and Alder thrive in nutrient-poor conditions. Know the noxious weeds on the Class A, B and C lists. Check out the Washington State Noxious Weed website (<http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/>) for photos of tansy, thistle, knapweed, and nightshade. Japanese Knotweed can be especially hard to control. Native trees and shrubs can also tell you a lot about conditions on the property. Go to [www.wnps.org](http://www.wnps.org) for photos of native trees and shrubs and their growth habits.

### □ Pay a Visit

Visit your prospective property during the rainy season or a storm event to observe the topography and drainage. See how and where water runs. If it all runs right where you want to build your barn or into the existing arena - bad news!

### □ The Neighborhood

Check out your potential new neighborhood to see if it is compatible with horses. Non-equine neighbors may not be tolerant of odors and flies, or early-morning tractors mowing pastures. A new development going in nearby might diminish riding trails or have other adverse effects.

### □ Accessibility

Evaluate accessibility, both for everyday deliveries as well as for emergencies. Are driveways wide enough for horse trailers and emergency vehicles? Can hay deliveries be made to the barn? Can a dump truck get through the gates? Are overhead phone wires going to be a problem?

## □ Natural Features

Inventory all natural features such as creeks, wetlands, and ponds. Then check on ordinances and regulations affecting water bodies in your county. For information on required buffers and setbacks, fencing, and other laws pertaining to environmentally-sensitive areas, check with Snohomish County Planning and Development Services, [http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Property\\_Info\\_FAQ.htm](http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Property_Info_FAQ.htm) or call 425-388-3411.

## □ Notice What's There Already

### **Buildings**

Look carefully at manmade features such as buildings (barns), outbuildings (sheds), arenas and fences. Inventory their usefulness, soundness and appropriateness for horses. Evaluate for any other improvements that may be needed in the future.

### **Manure Piles**

Is there an existing manure pile? How big is it and is it in a safe location? It may have to be removed if the pile is near a water source, on a steep bank or ravine, or just plain unusable. Think about having the cost of removal of the pile factored into the purchase price of the property, or request the current owner have the pile removed.

### **Severe Slopes**

Property with steep slopes, ravines, or difficult terrain will make mowing and management of the area difficult. It can also be unsafe for equipment and is not considered very suitable for livestock. Sensitive slopes may also require future erosion-control practices, which can be costly.

## □ Stocking Rates

Consider the size of your place and the number of horses you will have on it in terms of stalls, paddocks, and pastures. Horses can be kept on very small pieces of land (one or two acres) but if you want pasture, plan for an acre of pasture per horse.

## □ Riding Opportunities

Determine how easily you will be able to ride at your new location. Is there an arena or round pen, or easy access to equestrian-use approved trails? Never assume that horses are allowed in greenbelt areas or existing trails without researching it first.

## □ Wells and Septic Systems

Determine the location of the well and septic system and their relationship to other structures. State laws

require wellheads have a mandatory sanitary buffer of 100 feet in diameter to protect the water supply. Septic systems should be functioning properly and drainfields should not be under roads, driveways, confinement areas, or pastures.

Contact Snohomish County Planning and Development Services for more assistance with wells and septic systems: [http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Property\\_Info\\_FAQ.htm](http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Property_Info_FAQ.htm) or call 425-388-3411.



## □ Zoning and Floodplain Issues

Finally, research county, city or local zoning ordinances and community covenants yourself. Don't rely solely on a real-estate agent or word-of-mouth as these folks may not be fully aware of laws affecting horses and livestock. Be sure to check zoning and building codes if future plans include building structures. In Snohomish County, call 425-388-3411 or go to: <http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Services/FormsBrochures/>. Last but not least, is your potential new property in a flood plain? Check local flood maps to be sure!

## Questions?

Visit [www.betterground.org/site-visit](http://www.betterground.org/site-visit) or call 425-335-5634, ext 4 for a free farm visit.

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