

Honor Equestrian “House Hay”: Tifton 85

Tifton hay is in the Bermuda grass family along with Coastal and other common grass hays. But it has many benefits that people are unaware of over Coastal and Alicia hay. I will try to enlighten you on the good about feeding Tifton hays.

Tifton-85 was originally started for cattle feeding programs. When researchers realized all the good qualities this hay had to offer, it became very popular in the horse industry. It is perennial forage that originated in Africa and was imported to the humid Southern states for hay and pasture. Tifton is a cross breed between a tall, highly digestible African grass, and an Armyworm-resistant Bermuda grass from South Africa. The cross makes a wider blade, larger stem, darker green and highly palatable grass hay. It has a high crude protein and digestibility and is the highest quality grass among Bermuda grasses and is good for grazing and hay.

Tifton 85 makes excellent hay when properly managed and is comparable to alfalfa when cut on 3 1/2 week intervals. Digestibility runs over 65% and protein level can easily exceed 17%. Tifton 85 makes a lot of sense if you are looking for a high quality hay product based on its protein and digestibility profile.

Crops are started with sprigs, not seeds. The grass then establishes using rhizomes and runners. This hay produces fewer rhizomes than traditional coastal, but the rhizomes produced are much larger and higher quality. When grown as a hay crop, Tifton 85 produces up to two-thirds more forage per acre than coastal. Tifton has a much higher digestibility rate and higher fiber content than Coastal. In addition to all of this, Tifton 85 has been found to be one of the lowest starch and lowest sugar content hay options available, therefore having unlimited benefits to horses.

The way a horse utilizes sugar and starch is actually in a negative way in regard to processing excess. Any unused sugar is excreted to the hoof, and I don't mean in a good way. This is what can eventually lead to overweight, laminitic and even foundered horses. Tifton is beneficial to any horse. Many vets recommend horses that have weight, laminitis or founder issues to be on a diet strictly of Tifton due to its low sugar content. Tifton is also great for HYPP horses and can be one of the only hays that some HYPP horses do well on. I know from experience that an overweight horse can actually lose weight even on free choice Tifton, and that my HYPP gelding has much fewer episodes on Tifton versus Coastal hay. I also feel that because Tifton has a broader leaf and stem structure, there are fewer cases of impaction. I have never had an impaction in any of my horses that were on Tifton.

I just cannot rave enough about this hay. I hauled hay for 3 years and by the time I stopped hauling, 85 percent of my loads were filled with Tifton 85 hay. If you haven't tried it and have access to get nice Tifton, you should really give it a try. I will tell you though, it does take some horses a little time to start eating it well. I try to explain it to people like this, it's like real sugar versus Splenda, it just takes acquiring a taste for it! Once they start eating it, it is preferred by most. I have in the past put a roll of coastal and a roll of Tifton out at the same time, and the Tifton was gone way before the coastal.

-from OfHorse.com

HAY OPTIONS AVAILABLE IN OUR REGION

Hay Variety	Digestible Energy (Mcal/lb)	Acid Detergent Fiber %	Crude Protein (%)	Calcium (%)	Phosphorus (%)
Alfalfa	0.8 to 1.1	24 to 34	15 to 22	0.9 to 1.5	0.2 to 0.3
Coastal	0.7 to 1.0	28 to 38	6 to 11	0.3 to 0.5	0.15 to 0.3
Timothy	0.6 to 1.0	30 to 40	6 to 11	0.3 to 0.5	0.2 to 0.3
Tifton 85	? To ?	41 to 44	16 to 19	0.5	0.1 to 0.2