

# Creating our Paddock Paradise

by Dawn Crawford & Kevin Keeler

We first learned of Jamie Jackson's "Paddock Paradise" concept at a Pete Ramey/Dr. Bowker clinic sponsored by EasyCare last February 2007. We knew immediately that this was the answer to a feeding problem in our small herd of three horses. As soon as we got home from the clinic, we purchased the **Paddock Paradise** book and began making plans.

We have two Arabians and one Morgan. The Arabs are older and do not gain weight easily, while the Morgan can gain weight on a blade of grass. The horses have access to 4+ acres of flat pasture and a dry lot the size of an arena, which is covered with crushed red lava rock (very conditioning for the hoof and drains moisture quite well). During the growing season, prior to implementing Paddock Paradise, the Morgan had to be restricted to the dry lot, while the Arabs spent most of the day out on pasture. During those times of separation, the Morgan would stand in one place for hours, never moving except to go get a drink. That was about to change.

We decided to implement our Paddock Paradise in 3 phases. Lanes would be created inside of all the perimeter fences, along with one lane down the center of the property. Another lane would come off just one side of the center lane and connect up to a perimeter lane. The property was already fenced with wood posts and three strands of brown 1 1/2" electrical webbing. The lanes would be created with capped t-posts and 2



Close up of their fencing system.

strands of 1 1/2" brown electrical webbing. All lanes would be 20 ft in width. We chose to use the materials we did because we have open land around us and find that the brown electrical webbing blends in with the space around it, especially if the webbing is pulled tight so that it doesn't sag. As you can see from the picture, there is very little visual impact, even though you are looking through six fence lines.

All photos courtesy Dawn Crawford



The Morgan sleeping out on one of the lanes, while the Arab mare grazes in the pasture just on the other side of the lane.

Because of the materials we chose to work with, it became a much bigger job than first imagined (aren't most jobs like that!). Phase 1 and 2 took several weeks to complete. Phase 3 required us to move an existing perimeter fence line that ran the entire length of the property. Of course, it was just after we got that fence line down that the weather turned nasty. We did not want to go outside and finish the job, but as we were leaving soon for a week away and didn't want to leave the caretakers with temporary fencing, we bundled up and forced ourselves to go outside. No sooner had we started working than we looked up to see all three horses running around and around the lanes like they were a racetrack, slowing for the corners and going full out on the straight. This went on for well over 10 minutes. We both agreed the horses had just spoken to us, and the message was THIS IS GREAT! That's all it took to get us motivated to finish the job.

The Morgan now spends her days on the lanes while the Arabs have access to the pasture. As the Arabs move around the pasture, the Morgan can follow their movements out on the perimeter, feeling comfortable enough to even lie down and take a nap. To encourage even more movement, the Morgan's ration of hay is spread out over all the lanes, so that she might be getting only a few bites of hay at a time before looking for the next mouthful. This has become our version of the Easter egg hunt! We have also done the same thing with a bag of carrots, much to the delight and amazement of the horses. At night, all the horses come together to spend time out on the lanes as a group. Although we have not put pedometers on the horses, it is our observation that the horses move more when out on the lanes than when left to the open spaces of the pasture.

Unfortunately, we are dealing with irrigated land, and during growing season we irrigate once a week. To restrict the horses from areas of stand-

ing water, we created temporary gates of electrical webbing with gate handles that could be easily put up or removed on the lanes. It quickly became tedious trying to explain to each other where the gates needed to be as the irrigation changed location. We solved that issue by naming all the lanes. Naming the lanes seemed to give the property an identity it didn't have before.

One of the most unexpected and unanticipated results of this project is that it brought us closer to the property. Prior to the lanes going up, the only time we spent out on the pasture was during irrigation season. Now, every day we walk

the lanes to spread hay, often just as the sun is coming up. At night, just before bedtime, we take the dogs out and walk the perimeter of the property, often under the light of the moon. These are special times, and we give thanks each and every time we get to experience this connection to the property and the space around us.



The paddock lane that runs down the center of the property.

We also would like to thank Jamie Jackson for having the vision to see beyond the traditional methods of horse boarding. No matter where we end up living, as long as we have horses that need to be confined by fences in unnatural environments, Paddock Paradise will be a part of our lives. 🙏

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