



Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue's Care & Feeding Guide

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DONKEY RESCUE

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Introduction

Congratulations on your new donkey

Congratulations on adopting a donkey! Donkeys are intelligent, affectionate, and long-lived animals that can thrive for 30–40 years or more with proper care. While donkeys are part of the equine family, they are very different from horses in both body and mind. Understanding these differences is one of the most important factors in keeping your donkey healthy, happy, and safe. Their feeding, healthcare, training, and daily management should be tailored specifically to the needs of donkeys.

The staff at Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue is always here to help. Feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns on your journey through the world of long ears.

our website www.donkeyrescue.org

via email info@vdr.org

by phone 866-366-5731

by fax 866-898-6182

The information contained in this guide is intended to be used as a reference only. It is vital to your donkey's health to create a medical program specifically designed for your geographic area with help from your veterinarian.



Welcome

A simple guide for healthy, happy donkeys



Donkeys are remarkably resilient creatures. While most donkeys are classified as “easy keepers,” they do have particular requirements. Like any other animal, they can develop significant health issues when these needs are not fulfilled or simply as they age.



Before Your Donkey Arrives

Shelter

Provide a three-sided shelter or barn that protects from rain, wind, snow, ice and intense summer sun. Donkeys do not have a protective undercoat. Rain readily penetrates their coat and reaches the skin, increasing the risk of chilling and discomfort during wet weather. For this reason, all donkeys should have access to a dry shelter.

Fencing

We recommend no-climb horse fence, pipe fencing, woven wire. If possible avoid barbed wire, panels with large openings and damaged fencing.



Companionship

Donkeys are highly social animals and should never live alone. They form strong bonds with their companions and depend on social interactions for physical and mental health. Every donkey should have a compatible donkey, horse or mule companion to help a happy, healthy and enriched life. Your new long-eared friend will be much happier with a buddy by their side.

Those iconic long ears are much more than just adorable! Donkeys have incredibly sensitive hearing and can detect sounds over remarkable distances. In their native environment, the desert, it is believed a donkey may be able to hear another donkey braying from up to 60 miles away under the right conditions. Large blood vessels running through the ears help release excess heat cooling the blood before it circulates back through the body. This unique adaptation helps donkeys thrive in hot, arid environments.



Feeding Your Donkey

The Most Important Rule

Most pet donkeys are overfed. Obesity is a common and preventable health problem seen in donkeys. Those extra pounds place stress on the entire body and can lead to serious conditions such as laminitis, metabolic disease, arthritis and hyperlipemia. Donkeys evolved to thrive on sparse desert forage, so rich diets and excessive treats can quickly become dangerous. Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important things you can do to ensure your donkey lives a long, healthy life.

Forage

The majority of the diet should consist of grass, hay, native pasture, and low-sugar forage high in fiber.

Good Choices

- Coastal Bermuda
- Timothy hay
- Cereal straw without grain
- Prairie hay

There is an old saying that donkeys can survive on a whiff of hay and sunshine. While that's certainly an exaggeration, it reflects just how efficient donkeys are at utilizing feed. Donkeys evolved in harsh desert environments where food was scarce, allowing them to thrive on forage that would not sustain many other animals. This remarkable adaptation also means that they can gain weight very easily when provided with rich pasture, excessive hay or too many treats.

Exercise is just as important as proper nutrition. In the wild, donkeys may travel up to 20 miles each day in search of food and water. This constant movement helps maintain healthy body weight, muscle tone, hoof health and overall fitness. Domestic donkeys often have far less opportunity to move, making them susceptible to obesity and related health problems. Track systems, which encourage donkeys to walk between feeding, watering and resting areas are an excellent way to mimic natural movement patterns and promote a healthier, more active lifestyle.



Feed Smart, Keep It Simple

Grain

Most donkeys do not require grain.

Grain may be needed only for growing foals, pregnant or lactating jennets, elderly donkeys with difficulty maintaining weight, or medical conditions directed by a veterinarian.

Treats

- Think about offering small portions of carrot, apple, celery, and pumpkin as delightful treats.
- Avoid giving excessive treats, especially those rich in starch and sugar.

How much should I feed?

As a general guideline, an adult donkey should receive approximately 1.5-2% of its body weight per day in forage (hay and pasture combined) based on its ideal body weight, not its current weight.

Examples:

400 lb. donkey: 6-8 lb. of forage per day
500 lb. donkey: 7.5-10 lb. of forage per day
600 lb. donkey: 9-12 lb. of forage per day

Pastures

Careful pasture management is crucial for maintaining the health of donkeys, particularly those that are overweight or at risk of laminitis. Since grass sugar levels are at their lowest in the early morning and rise as the day progresses due to photosynthesis, managing grazing times can be a strategic approach to reducing the risk of metabolic issues. Limiting grazing during peak sugar production times can help prevent these problems. Additionally, using a grazing muzzle is an effective way to control weight while still allowing donkeys to enjoy the benefits of turnout, exercise, and social interactions. When fitted correctly, a grazing muzzle decreases the amount of forage intake without restricting movement, allowing donkeys to maintain a healthier body condition while engaging in their natural grazing habits. It's essential to regularly check the muzzle and the donkey's face for any signs of rubbing or irritation to ensure their comfort and safety.



Water, Minerals & Salt

Ensuring Proper Care for Donkeys

Donkeys must always have access to clean water. Regular cleaning of the trough is essential for maintaining proper hygiene. Additionally, they require constant access to salt.

At Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue, we offer a trace mineral salt block to fulfill our donkeys' mineral needs. These requirements can vary greatly based on soil conditions, forage quality, and geographical location. Therefore, you should provide an equine-approved mineral supplement designed to address the specific deficiencies in their area. Consulting with your veterinarian or equine nutritionist can assist you in choosing the most suitable mineral program for your donkey and local environment.

In summary, ensuring that fresh, clean water and salt are always available is crucial, as both contribute significantly to proper hydration and overall health.



Body Condition

Healthy Donkey

Ribs are difficult but not impossible to feel.
Firm neck without large fat deposits.
Flat or slightly rounded topline.
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Firm neck without large fat deposits.
Flat or slightly rounded topline.

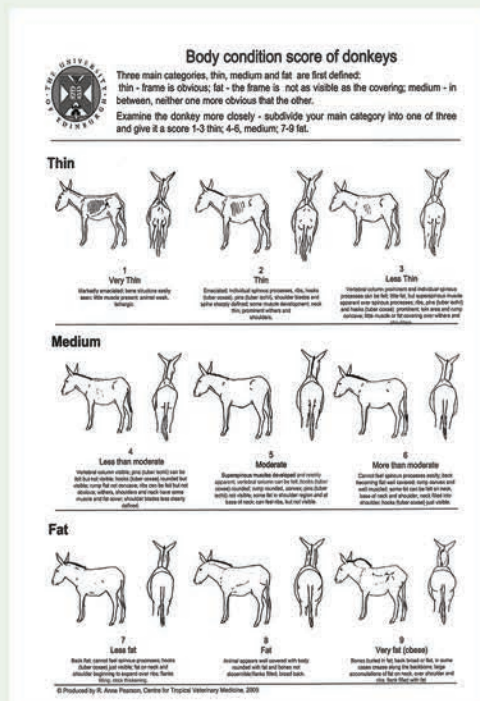
Watch for Weight Loss

Visible ribs
Prominent hips
Loss of topline muscle

Watch for Obesity

Fat crest on neck
Fat pads behind shoulders
Fat around tail head

A healthy body weight is one of the best gifts you can give your donkey!



Go to: pvdrbodyscore.org for a full size body condition chart



Hoof Care

Hoof neglect is one of the most common health concerns affecting donkeys in the United States. Unfortunately, many owners struggle to safely catch or handle their donkeys, making routine hoof care difficult. In other cases, farriers and owners become frustrated-or even fearful- when a donkey resists having its feet handled. To understand this behavior, it helps to remember how donkeys naturally interact with one another. During disagreements, donkeys often bite at each other's legs in an attempt to unbalance their opponent. Because of this instinct, many donkeys initially perceive someone reaching for their feet as a potential threat. When a person tries to pick up a donkey's foot, the donkey does not automatically understand what is being asked. Instead, it may respond with resistance, pulling away, leaning, kicking, or refusing to cooperate. These reactions are usually not signs of stubbornness or aggression, but rather a lack of trust, training, or understanding. With patience, consistency, and positive handling, most donkeys can learn to accept hoof care and become excellent patients for both their owners and farriers. Regular hoof trimming is essential to maintaining a donkey's comfort, mobility, and overall health.

The hoof is a complex digital organ that must receive proper care. Clean, dry ground is essential for a healthy hoof, as well as proper farriering. Farriers maintain, trim, and balance the hoof. Donkeys should be seen by a farrier every 6-8 weeks.



Veterinary Care

Annual Wellness Exam

Annual check-ups are an essential part of keeping your donkey healthy and happy. With good care and little luck your donkey will be around for a very long time. A comprehensive health history is an essential component of a thorough medical check-up. It helps to ensure that any potential health issues are identified early and that preventive measures are in place to maintain overall well-being. If you are switching veterinarians for any reason, always ask for a copy of their health records to give to the new one.

During the physical examination, a healthcare provider will assess vital signs such as heart rate, and temperature. They may also examine the body for any signs of illness or abnormality, ensuring that everything is functioning as it should.

Getting to know your donkey as an individual is vital to their overall well-being. Donkeys are extremely stoic and often only show subtle signs of illness until the disease has reached advanced stages. If you think something "is off" with them investigate further, you are probably right. If you can tell your donkey is sick, it's most likely an emergency.

Remember the Peaceful Valley staff is always here to provide support and answer any questions that arise, we are always happy to help.

Vaccinations

Vaccines are another essential part of the annual check-up. We recommend vaccinating for tetanus, eastern/western encephalitis, West Nile Virus, and rabies. Your veterinarian can advise you regarding disease risks in your local area.

Parasite Control

PVDR uses a targeted deworming program based on fecal egg counts. Do not deworm on a fixed schedule without veterinary guidance. Instead, it's important to assess each animal's needs individually to ensure effective parasite control while minimizing the risk of resistance. Regular monitoring and consultation with a veterinarian can help tailor the deworming strategy to the specific environment and herd health requirements. This approach not only promotes animal well-being but also contributes to sustainable herd health practices by preserving the efficiency of deworming agents. With thoughtful management, you can maintain healthy donkeys without risking parasite resistance.



Dental Care & Signs of Illness

Dental Care

A thorough dental exam is also needed, either by your veterinarian or a licensed equine dental provider. Donkeys should receive dental examinations every 1-2 years. They frequently develop many types of malocclusions. Left untreated dental issues will lead to an inability to properly grind forage. Early detection and treatment of dental issues is the best way to keep them eating their favorite foods for a lifetime.

Contact your dental provider if you notice dropping feed, weight loss, bad breath, slow eating, or nasal discharge that is not associated with respiratory infection.

Contact Your Dental Provider Immediately If Your Donkey has:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Bad breath
- Slow or painful chewing
- Packing hay in cheeks
- Drooling
- Dropping feed
- Rubbing teeth on fences or other structures
- Quidding (dropping balls of partially chewed hay)
- Foul smelling discharge from one nostril
- Sudden unexplained aggression or bad attitude
- Long hay fibers or un-chewed food in droppings

Call Your Veterinarian Immediately If Your Donkey

- Stops eating
- Appears depressed
- Has colic signs
- Has diarrhea
- Develops a fever
- Is reluctant to move
- Has difficulty breathing



Toxic Plants

While toxic plants vary from region to region, individual species native to North America span the entire continental United States. These plants pose a real danger and are a fatal threat if ingested in fresh or dried hay.

Most Common Species Found in the United States

Common Yarrow found naturally in every single state.

Bracken Fern also in all 48 continental states.

Common Sunflower is very prolific and widespread across the entire country.

Field Horsetail is native to areas with wet soil, often found in ditches and marsh edges.

Common Milkweed is dominant east of the Rockies.

Oleander not native to United States but widely used as an ornamental landscape plant. Thrives in warm climates.

Yew is common in both a native and non-native variety, also popular choice for landscaping, all varieties are highly toxic to equine.

Red Maple Trees are native to eastern and central North America.

Wilted Cherry Leaves, specifically wild Black Cherry and Chokecherry native to the eastern half of the US and parts of the Midwest and west. Fresh cherry leaves are normally safe, but wilting releases cyanide.

Locoweed native to western United States, the Great Plains, and Rocky Mountain regions.

Toxic Mushrooms of various varieties spread throughout the states.

Poison and Water Hemlock are the most lethal weeds in the country.

Tansy Ragwort found abundantly across pastures; effects are gradual and progressive as the toxins accumulate over time.

Johnsongrass and Sudan grass even in hay form can lead to a condition known as Sorghum Cystitis-Ataxia Syndrome. Most hazardous when under stress from environmental conditions like frost or drought.

Pokeweed common along fence lines.

Alsike Clover found heavily in damp clay soils.

Black Walnut Tree the true danger is in the wood when used as stall bedding.

Black Locust tree bark leaves and seeds are toxic.

Oak Trees acorns can be highly dangerous and are packed with tannins that damage digestive tract and kidneys.

Mountain Laurels native to eastern U.S.

Texas Mountain Laurels found in central Texas as well as parts of New Mexico

Your county extension agent can provide a comprehensive list of toxic plants in your specific region.



Seasonal Care

Summer

Provide shade

Provide fresh clean water: Monitor intake

Flies and Ticks: Watch for fly strike and examine for ticks and lice

Regular grooming: Remove loose hair and dirt, helps keep them cool

Adjust Feeding Schedules: Feed them in the cooler parts of the day

Check hooves regularly

Provide Dust Baths: Helps to naturally repel insects

Monitor Body Condition: watch for weight loss and dehydration

Keep Pasture Clean: Regularly clean and rotate pastures minimizing parasite load

Winter

Offer Shelter: Three to Four sided shelter is best depending on your area

Provide Extra Nutrition: donkeys require a diet rich in calories to maintain body heat.

Ensure they have access to high-quality hay and consider supplements if necessary.

Fresh water is also essential, so check that it doesn't freeze over.

Regular grooming helps maintain a healthy coat and allows you to check for any health issues. Brush their coats to remove dirt and debris

Ensure their hooves are clean and dry to prevent infections.

Keep a close watch on their health throughout the colder months. Be alert for signs of illness such as coughing, nasal discharge, lethargy, or weight loss.

Donkeys can decline rapidly in cold weather.

Provide Exercise

Despite the cold weather, donkeys need regular exercise to stay healthy. Ensure they have enough space to move around and consider leading them on walks to keep them active.



Breeding

Ten Minutes of “Aww” = 40 Years of Hay Bills

People often fall in love with the idea of breeding their donkey. After all, who can resist the thought of a fuzzy, long-eared baby bouncing around the pasture? Unfortunately, that adorable foal quickly grows into another donkey that needs feed, hoof care, vaccinations, dental work, parasite control, shelter, and a home for the next 30 to 40 years.

The reality of so many donkeys losing their desert habitat, and still thousands more of unwanted domestic donkeys across the United States. Rescue organizations are overwhelmed, and finding good homes for donkeys is often far more difficult than people imagine. Every planned breeding creates another donkey that must compete for limited resources and available homes.

Breeding also comes with risks. Jennets can experience difficult pregnancies and foal complications; foals can be born with health problems and emergency veterinary care can become expensive very quickly.

At donkey rescues, we see the results every day: accidental breedings, unwanted foals, elderly donkeys with nowhere to go, and animals that simply out lived their owners' ability to care for them.

So before breeding your donkey, ask yourself this question: “Am I creating a donkey because the world needs another one, or because I want a baby donkey?”

The good news is that if you simply want to enjoy donkeys, there are thousands already waiting for loving homes. Adoption saves a life, avoids the risks of breeding, and still provides all the long ears, brays, and personality a person could ever want.

Remember: Donkeys are like potato chips-you think one will be enough, but somehow you end up with twenty and a feed bill that requires a second mortgage.



Donkey Terms

Jennet (or Jenny) – A female donkey.

Jack – an intact male donkey.

Gelding – A castrated male donkey.

Foal – A baby donkey under one year of age.

Mule – The offspring of a jack donkey and a mare horse.

Hinny – The offspring of a stallion horse and a jennet donkey.

Bray – The distinctive vocalization made by a donkey.

Dorsal Strip – The dark stripe that runs down a donkey's back.

Shoulder Cross – The stripe across the shoulders that, together with the dorsal stripe, forms the donkey's characteristic cross.

Withers – The highest point of the shoulders; used when measuring height.

Body Condition Score (BCS) – A system used to assess a donkey's body fat and overall condition.

Refugia – The portion of a parasite population not exposed to dewormers, helping slow the development of parasite resistance.

Farrier – A professional who trims and cares for donkey hooves.

Laminitis – A painful inflammation of the laminae tissues that connect the skeletal system to the hoof wall.

Dental Float – The process of filing sharp points on a donkey's teeth.

Equilibration – Balancing the mouth by precise procedure that reshapes the biting surfaces of the teeth to ensure equal pressure.

Bonded Pair – Two donkeys with a strong social attachment that should ideally remain together.

Feral – A donkey living in the wild or with no human handling.

Pack Donkey – A donkey trained to carry equipment or supplies.

Bonus Donkey Rescue Terminology

"He's Friendly" – Usually means he will let you pet him while plotting his escape.

"Easy Keeper" – A donkey that gains weight just by looking at hay.

"Just One More" – The phrase heard immediately before someone ends up with five donkeys.

"Gate-Tested" – A donkey that has personally inspected every latch on the property.

"Donkey Math" – The mysterious phenomenon where one donkey somehow turns into ten.



Emergency Information

Keep These Numbers Readily Available

Veterinarian:

Farrier:

PVDR Contact:

Emergency Clinic:

Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue

Mailing Address:

PO Box 216

Miles, TX 76861

Ranch Address:

8317 Duckworth Rd

San Angelo, TX 76905

Phone: 866-366-5731

Fax: 866-898-6182

Web: donkeyrescue.org

Email: info@pvdr.org

PVDR Gift Shop: donkeyrescue.gifts

Donkey Adoption Application: donkeyadoption.org

Satellite Adoption Centers: pvdrlocations.org

Facebook.com/donkeyadoption

X.com/donkeyrescue



Special Needs

“Special Needs Donkeys”

Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue often has donkeys with special needs available for adoption or sponsorship. Many of these remarkable animals can become loyal and loving companions for someone willing to provide a little extra care.

Each donkey's needs are unique. Some may require a specialized diet, while others need daily medication to manage conditions such as metabolic disorder. Despite these challenges, these donkeys have just as much love, personality, and companionship to offer as any other donkey.

If you are unable to provide hands-on care, you can still make a meaningful difference by sponsoring a special-needs donkey with a monthly donation. Your support helps ensure these deserving donkeys receive the care, treatment, and comfort they need to live happy, healthy lives.





A note from the
Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue



“Special Needs does not mean a poor
quality of life - it simply means a
little extra care and attention.”

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