

# THE BRAY INTRODUCTION TO DONKEYS



## A Beginner's Guide to Donkey Ownership

First Edition



by Burros Rock Arizona & Yonder (BRAY)

## Introduction

“So what do you do with a donkey?” This is one of the first questions you get as a donkey owner, and one we at Burros Rock Arizona & Yonder (BRAY) set out to answer. You can do so much with these fabulous, clever, hearty little animals: from hiking and packing, to driving and shows, you can even have them as a running buddy! Of course it's our job as donkey owners and guardians to ensure we are as educated as possible to ensure our donkeys are happy, healthy, emotionally and intellectually content, and thriving before we ask them to do anything for us. However you may note that there is a lack of readily available information for how to achieve those goals when specifically related to donkeys in the American Southwest. It is for that reason we began BRAY, and for that reason we have written The BRAY Introduction to Donkeys.

We hope this guide will help answer some of your basic questions and set you and your donkey friends on a path to a long and enjoyable relationship, filled with adventure, fun, and lots of heehaws! For more information please see the education section of our website: [www.bray.club/education](http://www.bray.club/education), follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/brayclub](http://www.facebook.com/brayclub), and to meet new donkey-loving friends, ask questions of the community, and keep up with all the local donkey activities, join our Facebook group, Dusty Donkeys - Arizona's Burro Community at [www.facebook.com/groups/dustydonkeys/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/dustydonkeys/).

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# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Choosing a Donkey.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Bringing Home Burro .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Feeding Your Donkey .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Donkey Veterinary Basics.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>FantASStic Facts and Helpful Hints.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>31</b>

## CHAPTER 1: CHOOSING A DONKEY



Donkeys make wonderful pets. They are affectionate, personable, intelligent, and let's be real: adorable. Once you've decided that you want to add a long ear to your family it's time to start the exciting process of choosing the perfect donkey. An important aspect to consider is that donkeys are highly sociable animals, and it is not recommended that you have only one, even if you have other livestock. Donkeys do best with another donkey and in some cases they may even be frightened or upset by being forced to live with other livestock. It's not unusual for BLM donkeys to be frightened of horses, for instance. While it is highly recommended that you get two donkeys, be sure to be mindful about adding to your herd. Many, if not most, adult BLM jennies will be pregnant when they are rounded up, so keep that in mind if you choose a jenny: a two for one is possible-to-likely. Additionally it's not unusual for a family to have two donkeys, decide they want to bring home a third, only to find now they have one animal upset when it's left home alone while the other two go out for hikes and adventures, or the two dominant donkeys will "odd man out" the third, necessitating the acquisition of a fourth, which then over-extends the family's time, and financial, budget. You will often see jokes and memes about out of control animal acquisition, and while we can all appreciate the humor, it is wise to put significant thought into adding another living creature to your home.

### **Why do you want a donkey?**

It's important to first honestly consider why you want a donkey. They are a significant undertaking and investment of both time and funds, and live upwards of 40 years. Some people want a donkey as a livestock guardian or as a photo prop for trendy businesses such as beverage burros. In either case we ask you to reconsider. Donkeys make poor livestock guardians, being prey animals themselves they are often attacked or

killed by the very animals they are meant to protect against. Additionally the trait that makes them appealing as a predator deterrent, their tendency to be territorial, means they are just as likely to stomp your sheep or goats as a coyote. Finally a donkey's diet is much different than any other barnyard animal, and being fed in the same manner as production livestock, whose goal is to get fat, will lead to health issues and possibly death for your donkey. If you wish to get a donkey because they are the cool new trend, and you've heard there is money to be made, we also urge you to reconsider. Like any trend the beverage burro's appeal will wane, and you will have 37 more years of donkey to look after.

If your goal with your new pet is, instead, companionship, a pack animal, a driving animal, or simply a trail or pasture buddy then read on! We'll help you select the perfect burro for your lifestyle and goals.

**Working animals:** If you want a working animal, for packing, driving, or even possibly riding, it's important to get an animal that is of sound mind and body. If you will not be happy with your donkey unless they are able to perform a task you should seek out an animal that is already trained and proven in said task. This is not a situation where you should go to the local sale barn or BLM pen and grab whatever strikes your fancy and hope to mold it into the animal of your dreams. We also caution you to be very careful acquiring unrehabilitated and unproven rescues for this purpose. Depending on the situation rescues have often received poor nutrition (overfeeding, underfeeding, or sometimes both) that can affect their strength and soundness. They also may have emotional triggers from their past that you are unaware of until you try to introduce your animal to a pack saddle and they react strongly and dangerously to it. If you are looking for a working or performance animal and will not be happy with a pet, be prepared to pay for a working or performance animal. A trained, tested, and proven animal of average size and looks will generally cost at least \$1200. If you are after a more sought after animal like a trained riding or driving mammoth you can expect to pay at least \$2,500. Don't feel awkward asking for a pre-purchase veterinary exam for a donkey, just like you would a horse.

Keep in mind also a donkey is not fully finished physically maturing until it is six years old. This means if you have a donkey you'd like to have put into strenuous work they should be at least six years old. It may be a better choice for you to choose an older animal, a five to seven year old, for instance, if you want to begin working with them as soon as you get them. While babies are certainly cute and fun, they do take a few years to mature.

**BLM Burros From Holding:** BLM Burros are the wild (feral) donkeys that are rounded up by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) then adopted out to new homes. After the BLM conducts a gather, or round up, the animals are sent to be processed where they are given a freeze brand on the left side of their neck for identification purposes, vaccinated, given a Coggins test, and if they are a jack they are gelded (castrated). The freeze brand makes these animals easy to spot as unlike a hot brand which burns the skin and kills the hair follicles, a freeze brand uses liquid nitrogen and destroys the natural pigments in hair resulting in white hair growth. The freeze brand will tell you the approximate year the animal was born and the animal's 6-digit registration number. After processing the donkeys are sent to a holding facility where they can be adopted, sent to a pop-up adoption event, or put online for an online auction. These animals are completely untrained and many untouched by people.

- BLM Holding Facility Adoptions: There are a total of 18 off range corrals, or holding facilities, in 12 different states for BLM horses and donkeys. Each facility has slightly different rules for their adoption process, however, no matter the facility a completed BLM adoption application and BLM approved home-facilities are required. Many of the BLM holding facilities allow you to walk along all of the pens that have animals, even interact with some of the friendly animals. In Ridgecrest, California visitors are even able to feed the animals treats and most will approach

the fence and interact with people. At these very open facilities you're able to select any of the available animals and can take your time choosing by watching how they act with the other donkeys and with you near the fence. A few of the holding facilities are at prisons, such as the Florence, Arizona Wild Horse and Burro Training and Off-Range Corral. Movement is more limited here and often specific appointments are required. These facilities hold specific adoption events or days and a limited number of animals are pulled into an adoption area. Unfortunately the selection at these facilities is often limited since the main pens are in restricted areas. You can take time to observe the selection of donkeys but don't be distraught if none of the ones available will work for you; come the next adoption day, or next appointment, there will be a different selection. Regardless if the facility is partnered with a prison or a stand-alone BLM holding facility the adoptions here are first-come, first-served. All adoption animals are \$125\*, sale authority animals are \$25\*\* and there are no holds. If the facility is at a prison then there might be trained animals available through the prison-training program. These fees vary but these animals should be considered green-broke at best.

- BLM Pop-Up Adoption Events: Throughout the year the BLM will arrange for a "pop-up" adoption event where horses and donkeys are hauled to a suitable location and made available to adopt. This type of event allows for the adoption of a BLM animal even if you're unable to go to a holding facility to adopt. Unlike the facility adoptions these events are live competitive auctions with a \$125 minimum fee/starting bid. Typically the auction is on a Friday or Saturday and animals that did not sell via auction are available first-come, first-served afterwards. Occasionally these events will offer trained animals via live auction.
- BLM Online Adoption Corral (auction): Approximately every 1-2 months the BLM conducts an online auction via their online corral. Donkeys are not commonly available but a handful appear here and there. Pictures and a short video of the animal moving are available, however, information is ultimately limited and you're essentially purchasing an animal sight unseen. On occasion there might be a note about the animal, such as "super sweet" or "extremely flighty" but that is far from the norm and should not be expected. The BLM will not ship or haul the animal to you: if you win an animal in the online auction you are responsible for securing transportation.
- BLM Herd Management Areas: Herd Management Areas (HMAs) are the different locations from which BLM burros are gathered. Different HMAs have different populations with different characteristics so it is wise to research different HMAs and what can be expected of the burros there. One thing to note is HMAs with lush grass such as in the Northern US or donkeys gathered from the Oatman area where the animals survive on a diet of alfalfa purchased by tourists may be overweight-to-obese and may have suffered from laminitis.

\*It is important to note that BLM animals that are adopted are owned by the BLM for one year post-adoption. After caring for the animal for a year the adopter receives a title application to have their veterinarian sign to state the animal has been well cared for then the title to the animal is issued. \*\*Sale authority animals come with their title at the time of sale.

## Example of a Freeze Brand



Left: Freeze brands use alpha angle to code the numbers so while this might look like a bunch of random angles it is actually a code! This particular freeze brand states that the animal was born in 2018 and has a registration number of 743903.

Right: A photo of a freeze brand on a BLM donkey - not all BLM brands are this clear but this is an excellent, legible example.

**TIP Trained Burros:** TIP, or Trainer Incentive Program, is a program by the Mustang Heritage Foundation which gives approved trainers a stipend to train BLM animals. The trainer receives payment when the animals are adopted out.

- The animals are supposed to leave the TIP trainer's facility "gentled," meaning they can be approached, haltered, led, pick up all four feet, and can load in a trailer. However these standards are not as tightly enforced as many wish, and some people have learned some tricks of the trade regarding how to make an animal appear much more gentle than it is.
- Doing your research and choosing the right TIP trainer can mean the difference between a solidly green-broke donkey, and a donkey that not only remains ungentled, but has learned to become avoidant. You can find a list of TIP Trainers on the Mustang Heritage Foundation website (<https://mustangheritagefoundation.org/tip-trainers/>). It is in your best interest to interview trainers before choosing one who is right for you. Ask them for references of satisfied adopters, ask to visit their facility to meet the burro you are planning to adopt. Reputable trainers will not just be happy for you to be part of the process, they are likely to prefer it that way. Plan to go work with your prospective animal and the trainer at least 2-3 times before you bring your new burro home so the transition is as seamless as possible.
- Ask the trainer if they have any previously gentled or trained burros on the property. If they do ask to see them handle those animals: approach, halter, lead, pick up their feet, fly spray, etc.
- Don't forget: unless you have paid the trainer for training over and above the TIP requirements, you're getting a *gentled* burro, not a trained burro. You will have to continue their training once you bring them home if you want a trained burro. Gentled burros, even well-started gentled burros, can quickly regress if skills aren't practiced and if you don't form a bond with them.

**Kill Pen Donkeys:** "Kill pens" are one of the most contentious aspects of the equine industry. A kill pen owner will typically buy animals at auction and then sell them at a markup with the statement that if the animal is not sold in a specified amount of time they will go to slaughter. Many people choose this route for acquiring rescues, many others are staunchly against it. Regardless of where your opinions lie in that particular discussion there are some things one needs to be aware of when buying these animals.

- Often kill pens are not located where the buyer is, they typically sell an animal through online auctions, for “bail”, and it’s shipped to the new owner.
- As with any animal that goes through a sale barn there is an extremely high likelihood they will arrive at their new home sick, injured, or at very least heavily exposed to diseases and parasites. Have a plan with your vet BEFORE bringing one of these animals home, and be sure you have a very strict quarantine protocol in place. If you live in a location where it’s difficult to get seen by a vet, or if you don’t yet own your own trailer to haul the animal into the vet, its recommended prospective owners go through a rescue that has already done the work of rehabbing the animal.
- Many kill pens work with “quarantine facilities” where they will ship the animal you’ve purchased for a few weeks to a few months at the new owner’s expense, claiming that when they proceed to send them along to you, the new owner, they are disease free. This is not the case. Many equine diseases survive quite well in the soil and on surfaces or in water tanks. An endless rotation of extremely ill animals would ensure there’s nearly no way to properly sanitize these locations between animals.
- Be aware that it’s not unusual for a completely different animal than the one you thought you purchased to show up at your barn door. Typically the kill pen will say you’re welcome to pay to ship it back and they’ll sell it for you, but beyond that there’s little recourse, you’re stuck with a random animal they’ve been unable to offload via online auction.
- If you purchase a kill pen animal, just like any rescue, you should factor in minimum \$3,000 in follow-up vet care to get their vaccines, teeth done, wormed, hoof x rays, corrective trimming, and to cure up any illnesses they have.
- Animals from kill pens are not just very likely to be ill, there is also a good chance they will be difficult to handle and administer medications. Keep this, and if you have a facility that allows you to handle a difficult animal safely, in mind when deciding if you want a sale barn or kill pen animal.

**Rescues:** There are two different routes widely considered rescues: there are party-to-party rescued animals, such as one you may buy for a song off Craigslist, or offer a handful of cash to a neighbor to improve its situation, and there are rescue groups such as nonprofits who take in animals in poor situations as a business.

- Party-to-party rescues: these animals will of course be as-is. Much like picking up a dog advertised on Facebook, or a kitten out of a haystack, these situations will be as varied as the animals. Some may be in decent shape, decently trained or friendly, some will have severe health problems, will be avoidant, aggressive, or frightened. Every situation will be different but you will, of course, want to quarantine these animals and have a vet look at them as soon as possible if they don’t have veterinary records.
- Rescue groups: unfortunately there are no rules in the United States as to who can and cannot call themselves a rescue group. You will want to do your research to find a reputable rescue. If a rescue states they do veterinary care such as dentals and vaccinations with an animal be sure to ask for proof of said care, you will need them for your veterinarian. Be sure to read rescue contracts closely to ensure you are comfortable with all terms described therein. If you wish to bring home a kill pen animal but don’t feel you’re able to correctly care for it immediately following its sale barn experience, a rescue that specializes in sale barn animals may be a good fit for you.

**Breeders and Trainers:** If you are looking for a trained animal or an animal for a specific purpose going to a breeder or trainer may be your best option. As with rescues and TIP trainers, you should do your research regarding trainers and breeders. A good trainer or breeder can assist you in your search for either a prospect or a finished animal. In either case it is a good idea to ask to see examples of their animals.

**Auctions and Sale Barns:** There are two main types of auctions or sales one will encounter when purchasing equids:

- Your (possibly local) open to all livestock auction and sale barn. They may have horse, donkey, and mule sales on specific days or equids may simply be sold amongst the other lots of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, saddles, and chutes. These are a common place for any and all people to drop off any donkey that no longer serves its purpose, whether that be living with their cattle, a pet for their kids, or a roping dummy. These are the same animals the kill pen buyers are buying. There is typically no guarantee on the animal aside from what you see in front of you in the ring. If you can haul the animal in and are willing to sign a paper stating you're the owner, you can sell an animal at the sale barn. These animals may sell for as little as market price per pound of live weight.
- Invitation Sales: These are much more exclusive. They tend to be more of an "event" that takes place as part of a larger donkey and mule event such as Ozark Mule Days. For animals to be allowed in these sales they typically have to be of a higher caliber: trained well, breeding quality, or prospects. The breeders and trainers are usually known to the organizers of the sale, and some can be quite competitive to get your animals into. You can often find high quality stock at these sales, but be prepared to pay high quality prices.

**Choosing for Color:** We all have aesthetic preferences when it comes to our animals but be sure to think critically about your color preferences when buying an animal, as some choices go beyond aesthetic preference.

- Spotted and "white" donkeys: Spotted donkeys have a little extra splash and flash, but they can come with downsides too. Donkeys can and do get sun-related skin cancers so bear in mind that any donkey with substantial spotting on the face, especially around the eyes and nose where skin is exposed, will have to wear a fly mask with high UV protection mesh every day to help prevent cancer. White legs or socks also tend to be more prone to fly strike and urine scald, so you may have to use fly boots or swat and keep a closer eye on these areas. White skin where tack such as a saddle or pack saddle sits can be more prone to galling. A max white spotted donkey (a donkey who appears all white, but in fact genetically is just "one big white spot") will likely need to be kept in a fully shaded area during the summer, as fly sheets can make the animals too hot during soaring summer temps.
- "Blue" or "Pink" donkeys: These donkeys are roan, but donkey-roan is somewhat like a gray horse in that they start their lives darker colored and then with each shed cycle will get more white hair in their coat. Some might be nearly "white" in their older age, while others will retain a roan/speckled appearance. Unlike gray horses these donkeys are not prone to melanomas. If you purchase one of these donkeys because you're in love with their color, be sure to take a photo because it won't stay that way.



Above: Two examples of spotted donkeys. Spotted donkeys will have varying amounts of white, meaning varying amounts of pink skin.



**Left:** A “blue” donkey in the beginning of its roaning. **Middle:** A donkey in the middle of roaning, this particular pattern is often referred to as “reverse dapple.” **Right:** A donkey that has completely “roaned out” and appears nearly white.

**Avoid High Pressure Sales:** For most, acquiring a fairly young donkey will be a lifelong commitment. Don’t allow yourself to take home a donkey you don’t love or haven’t had a chance to meet or interact with in person just because the seller said someone else was coming to get it. Especially don’t send money to anyone online to “hold” a donkey, or downpayment for delivery unless you can confirm this person’s existence. Scams abound with donkeys and using your good judgment will save you lots of heartache. If you see a donkey you love and the seller tells you you have to complete the purchase within a couple hours or someone else will get them? Wish that donkey luck in its new home, there will always be more donkeys to purchase.

**Looking at a Prospective donkey:** You’ve found a donkey you like, you’re comfortable that the seller is presenting the animal in a truthful (or truthful enough) manner, and you’re ready to go look at your prospective new donkey. There are some things to keep in mind when evaluating the animal before you.

- Does this appear to be the same animal advertised? Animals may look significantly different in summer and winter coats, but keep a keen eye out for a bait and switch.
- If the animal is described as tame or at least catchable, ask the seller to demonstrate. A common tactic amongst sellers is to have the animal caught and tied when you arrive. Ask them to turn them loose in the middle of the pen or paddock, leave the pen or paddock, return, catch, and halter the donkey.
- Have the seller demonstrate any skills they claim the donkey possesses. Does the animal pack? Ask them at minimum to tack the donkey fully and walk it around the property, but ideally you want to go on an outing to see how it responds to dogs, bicycles, etc. Is the donkey trained to ride? Ask the seller to demonstrate. You will want to do the same with driving. Have the seller pick up all four feet and hold

them for at least a 10-count. Touch the donkey about the head, ears, mouth, and have the seller walk around the donkey with a hand on the animal to ensure it doesn't shy away or kick out.

- Have the seller trot the donkey or turn it loose in a paddock or arena to trot, so you can see if they are sound at a gait more than a walk.
- If you feel the donkey appears safe enough for you to do so, try all of these skills yourself.
- Take a hard look at their hooves. You can tell a lot about a donkey's recent history by their hooves. Long, ridgy, broken, ruffled hooves can indicate a lack of care, significant stress, and/or an improper diet. This is to be somewhat expected of rescued animals, although if the donkey has long feet you may question why they have not been trimmed? Are they afraid of farrier tools? If you have a trainer or breeder whose donkeys have poor hooves it's time to look more critically at what they're selling.
- Never be afraid to walk away from a purchase if the animal is not what you're looking for.

**Location and Timing:** When you choose a burro to bring home be sure you note the location from which it originates, and the time of year, as this may affect how you initially care for your donkey. For instance if you live in a climate where it snows, and your purchase a BLM burro gathered from Kingman, AZ, held for two months in Florence, AZ and you intend to bring it home in October to a home where snow is a possibility, you are going to want to ensure you have several measures in place to keep them warm, and prioritize training them to accept a blanket, because they will be unlikely to acclimate to your weather for 1-2 winters. There have been many hot weather donkeys who have succumbed to snowy winters because their new owners did not consider that they were poorly adapted to the weather change, nor did they consider temperatures are still well over 100° at the HMA or holding, while it's below freezing at their new home . Consider also the time of year for transporting. If you have found the perfect riding donkey from a breeder in Tennessee, and you made the purchase in mid July, consider asking them if they will board the animal until at least mid September when temperatures cool off overnight and you can safely drive a trailer from sundown to sunup. Trailering in summer heat is a common cause of colic, founder and laminitis, and the heat of the road increases likelihood of tire blowouts and trailer fires.

**Which gender is better: males or females?** While there are notable differences between the genders of burros it is important to remember that every donkey is an individual, as are their owners. Which gender is better will come down to personal preference, with the exception of jacks (uncastrated) burros.

- Jacks: An uncastrated male donkey is called a "jack" and is not for beginners. A great jack makes an even better gelding (castrated) burro. Male donkeys are noted for their rough play but that play is even more aggressive with a jack. Jacks are notoriously aggressive, even if they start out as the sweetest foal as they mature and their hormones kick in they'll likely become territorial and aggressive. It takes an extremely experienced owner and trainer to handle a jack. If you purchase an uncastrated burro book an appointment with your vet as soon as you can so that he may be gelded.
- Geldings: Castrated male burros are called geldings. A gelding can live with other geldings or jennets (female burros) and are typically described as mild mannered and relaxed, and without the influence of testosterone.
- Jennet/Jenny: A female donkey is called a jennet or jenny. It is important to note that unlike with dogs or cats where both genders can be sterilized (spayed/neutered), in equines it is only the males that are sterilized (unless medically necessary for a female) which makes it particularly important to make sure to geld jacks. Many who favor owning jennets will report that they're more protective than a gelding. A jenny still will be influenced by hormones, unlike a gelding. A jenny in estrus (in "heat" or in "season") around a jack can be nearly as dangerous and difficult to handle as a jack. This is another reason why having an uncastrated jack around your property can be problematic.

## CHAPTER 2: BRINGING HOME BURRO



You've chosen the perfect burro companion, and you want to ensure you have everything you need to ensure your new long-eared buddy lives their healthiest, happiest life; Here's your BRAY guide to Bringing Home Burro: steps, prep, and tips on how to ensure your burro will thrive at it's new home. As always with BRAY advice, these are generalities that apply to the majority of donkeys, there will always be exceptions to the rule, and everything dealing with living creatures has nuance.

### Before Picking Up Your Donkey

**Health and Wellness:** It can be difficult, especially in rural areas, to find service providers for donkeys. Additionally, travel and re-homing can be difficult on animals and you may find yourself with stress or travel induced issues that need to be immediately addressed. Before bringing home your donkey you will need to find:

- An equine veterinarian with experience with donkeys. There is a shortage of equine veterinarians, you will want to be proactive and call to schedule an appointment with a veterinarian as soon as you get your new donkey home, if not before. You should ask the previous owner what healthcare the donkey has received with regards to vaccinations, parasite control, dental care, a sand control protocol (psyllium), and a Coggins/EIA test and pass that information along to your vet. Your vet will be able to tell you when you should schedule a new patient intake appointment for your animal. This is ESPECIALLY important if you are getting an animal from a sale barn or "kill pen" as they often arrive at their new homes with serious diseases.
- A farrier/trimmer with experience with donkeys. Many trimmers will not trim donkeys, so be sure to ask your current farrier, if you have one, if they are willing to trim donkeys. If they are not, or you do not have a farrier, you should do everything in your power to locate a farrier before you bring your donkey home. When their feet start looking unkempt eight weeks after they arrive at your home is not the time to begin your farrier search. Be wary of farriers who feel that donkeys need to be handled harshly. Those who are unused to working with donkeys may believe that outmuscling or overpowering a donkey, by snubbing it to a post, tying elaborate ropes and knots around various parts of their bodies, or laying them down is the best way to trim a donkey. In reality this will typically just lead to escalating avoidant or hostile behavior. Going slow and allowing your donkey time to consider and think about what is being asked (not demanded) will lead to better overall farrier experiences. If your donkey is from

a rescue situation, or has particularly neglected feet, you should consult your veterinarian about getting x rays, or radiographs, of their feet to help guide your farrier in their hoof rehabilitation.

**Housing:** Burros are desert-adapted animals, which means their home should as closely resemble their natural desert habitat as possible. These suggestions are for gentled donkeys. The Bureau of Land Management has their own fencing requirements you will have to meet for ungentled burros.

- Room to roam: As with all equids, donkeys do best with space to stretch their legs, roll, run, play, and generally live as close as possible to their wild lives. A 12'x12' box stall or 14'x14' panel pen is unlikely to be sufficient space for your donkey, and there is a good chance they will develop stable vices, poor habits, and an unpleasant attitude. At minimum they require a stall with a run, and regular daily turnout, but the larger the area you can give them, the better.
- Substrate and footing: Donkeys do not do well full-time on grass or pasture of any kind. They will typically become overweight or obese, and will be at risk for laminitis and founder. While they can safely be turned out for limited amounts of time on grass, you will need a dry lot where they spend the majority of their time. Proper footing for your donkey includes dirt or sand, ideally with some areas of hard-packed substrate, which will help them build and maintain healthy hooves. Although it's not required, donkeys enjoy elevation changes such as dirt piles or hills in their living areas.
- Proper fencing: Donkeys possess a remarkable ability to squeeze under or between the lowest fence rails, or jump higher than you expect them to. Five rail pipe fencing is typically a good choice for standard donkeys, and no-climb or goat-tight fencing, with rails at the top and bottom, will typically safely keep in minis or larger as long as they are not flighty or wild. If your animal is likely to hit the fence trying to escape, pipe fencing is a better option. Seeing as donkeys are browsers you will want to avoid wood fencing materials; to a donkey those are simply a tasty snack. We do not recommend barbed wire fencing for any equine, or any animal you are or will become emotionally attached to, or if you wish to avoid vet bills, as it routinely causes severe lacerations, other injuries, or death. You will also want a secondary locking mechanism on your fence, such as a snap or carabiner on the latch, or a chain around the gate. Donkeys waste little time in learning how to unlatch gates, especially if there is tasty grass or hay on the other side. Ensure your fencing is correctly anchored. A round pen made of portable panels cannot safely stand on its own indefinitely. Donkeys will push against and move the panels to gain access to snacks outside the pen, and monsoon rains or microburst winds can pick them up and fling them around your property. Always use anchor posts, cemented into the ground, when creating your pens.
- Shade: Shaded areas, with shade accessible at all times of the day, are a must. Ensure you have enough shade for all of your donkeys to be standing in the shade at the same time, while still maintaining 3-4' of space between them and the next donkey. During soaring summer temperatures it's essential that body heat be able to escape without warming up a neighbor. Shade can consist of non-toxic, mature trees (if they are accessible to your donkeys be sure to wrap the trunks in hardware cloth, no climb fencing, or erect a fence around the trunk or your donkeys *will* kill your trees), shade cloth, metal or wood, but you will want to ensure the shade is high enough that there is sufficient air flow below the shade, above the donkeys, and to allow you to comfortably clean up manure below the shade. Shades should be a minimum of 7' high for a standard donkey. If your shade is made of metal consider painting the top with a heat deflecting roof coating such as elastomeric.
- Shelter: Donkeys typically do not like shelter they cannot see out of, and as such they have a tendency to be unhappy in a typical box stall. In most of Arizona it is generally sufficient to offer your donkey a covered area with a one or two sided wind break, situated at a slightly higher elevation than the surrounding area so it will stay dry in a rainstorm. Pay attention to prevailing winds, particularly in the winter, and arrange your shelter so that winds are blocked to maximum effect. If you live in colder

climates where snow is likely, a three sided shelter may be the best choice for your donkey. The same requirement applies regarding prevailing winds: a three sided shelter is simply a snow catcher if winter winds come from the north and your shelter opens to the north.

- Flora and plant life: A sweep of your pasture and surrounding areas with a plant identification handbook or app, such as PictureThis! and a list of toxic plants, such as the one you will find on the ASPCA website (<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/horse-plant-list>) is an integral part of setting up a safe area for your donkey. It is a myth that donkeys will not eat toxic weeds, and there are many native and non-native plants that can harm or kill your donkey, such as locoweed, datura/jimson weed, globe chamomile, and oleander. In addition to identifying toxic plants you will want to do your best to clean up any seed pods, such as those from mesquite and palo verde, and trim low hanging branches. These desert trees are non-toxic to donkeys, and in fact make great occasional enrichment snacks, but in this case the adage is true: the dosage makes the poison. Too much of these tasty legumes can lead to obesity, colic, or laminitis. Additionally you should remove any cacti with glochid, or hair-like spines. Your donkeys will also find these to be a tasty treat, but those tiny spines can work their way into your donkey's lips, gums, and even eyes.

**Feed and Water:** The final step of setting up your donkey's new home is acquiring proper feed, proper feed stations, proper feed storage, and proper water troughs that work for you and your animals.

- Feed: For an in-depth explanation of feeding, feed types, and feed vernacular, please see the section on feeds and feeding (Chapter 3). The short version is this: because of donkeys' extremely efficient digestive systems they do very well on low calorie feeds. Typically in Arizona that will mean bermuda grass hay, teff grass hay, and barley straw. Most donkeys who are not in hard work packing, driving, or hiking, will do best on 1.5% of their body weight (a BLM burro usually weighs around 400-450 lbs, a 32" mini weighs around 215 lbs) in grass hay per day, and free choice straw. A fishing scale is a great way to measure out portions of hay for your donkey, just know it may take a little fiddling around to get the exact right amount to maintain the perfect weight as all animals will have a slightly different metabolism, and it changes throughout their life. You will often hear people saying donkeys should be fed "low quality" hay. This *does not* mean dusty, moldy, or full of weeds. *Do not feed your donkey dirty or spoiled hay.* When low quality hay is mentioned they simply mean low calorie hay like bermuda grass, as opposed to a higher protein hay like alfalfa (a legume). We recommend slow feed bags for donkeys, to allow more time to properly digest their feed. If you have multiple animals in the pen or pasture we recommend at least one feeding station per animal + one, spaced at least three donkey-lengths apart. This will help prevent resource guarding and bullying at the hay net. When possible, feed donkeys over stall mats (as long as they remain shaded, to avoid becoming excessively hot), in buckets, tubs, or over troughs to help prevent sand ingestion. Donkeys should also be offered free choice salt. This can be in the form of pressed blocks, loose, or hanging natural salt blocks. You will likely notice seasonal changes in salt consumption. Donkeys will consume more in the summer months to replace any salt they have lost via sweating.
- Feed Storage: Feed storage is an incredibly important and often overlooked aspect of setting up your livestock area. Proper feed storage that prevents spoiling and prevents loose animals from accessing feed is essential not just for saving your wallet, but could save your animal's life. Hay should be kept in a dry area, ideally not directly on the dirt. Many people use simple shipping pallets under their hay stack. Ideally hay will be kept under cover to prevent being rained on. A hay barn or shed is best for allowing access along with shelter from the elements, but a large tarp, properly and tightly tied down over the top and covering all sides works well. You may consider building up your hay storage area so it sits slightly higher than the surrounding area to prevent water damage on lower bales. Avoid storing hay in lofts above your burros, as this can predispose them to respiratory disease. Grain, supplements,

and other feeds for all species in your barnyard, should be carefully stored behind at least two layers of preventative measures; a tack and feed room with a locking door, or a feed stall with a locking door, as well as locking bins. VittleVaults, plastic footlockers with locking mechanisms, etc are all good choices. Be sure to *close the lid tightly and correctly every time* you are finished accessing feed. If your donkey accesses feed or supplements in your feed room it is a veterinary emergency. Contact your vet for treatment immediately, even if they are not showing signs of distress. Keeping feed and supplements properly stored will also prevent spoilage from insects and rodents.

- Water:** Donkeys, especially formerly wild donkeys, can be particular about water sources. Formerly wild donkeys often prefer to drink out of low troughs which allow them to keep the majority of their head and face out of the trough. Some speculate this is likely because in the wild a watering hole can be a place for predators to wait to ambush donkeys, so they prefer to have as much visibility as possible. Sheep and goat troughs can be a good choice for these animals. You may choose to purchase several types of troughs initially to ascertain which type your donkey prefers. Muck buckets, cattle troughs, plastic 55 gallon drums cut in half can all be functional options. BRAY strongly suggests you do not use automatic waterers. They are difficult to clean, and in the summer the water temperature can reach scalding levels, dissuading your animals from drinking sufficient water. Water troughs should be kept filled and clean. A dish scrubber or stiff cleaning brush can be used to accomplish this. In the summer when temperatures are warm you may need to empty, scrub, and refill water troughs as often as every one to two days. Keep this in mind when choosing the type of water trough to use for your animal. A small aquarium net can be used to scoop debris such as hay bits or leaves out of the water trough between cleanings.

**Facilities Maintenance:** When designing your donkey spaces keep in mind routine maintenance and maintenance costs. Some aspects, such as fencing and shade materials, have a wide range of upfront costs. This is often a case of “you get what you pay for” and choosing the most inexpensive options is likely to lead to increased costs down the line, both monetarily and in labor. Fences constructed of t-posts and hog panels, for example, may seem like a quick and easy solution, but it will only be a matter of time before your donkey decimates your fencing, possibly hurting themselves in the process.

## **Bringing Your Donkey Home**

Once your donkey has arrived home it's important to give them a couple days to settle in and get used to their new home before beginning training or significant handling. Donkeys are highly intelligent creatures and will want an opportunity to get the lay of the land before they can focus on you.

**Quarantine:** To prevent the spread of infectious disease BRAY recommends quarantining new animals to your property *at minimum* until you can have a coggins test and fecal float for parasites done. It is the best practice to speak with your vet about a quarantine and introduction plan before bringing an animal home. Colorado State University recommends low-risk animals be quarantined for seven days while high-risk animals be quarantined for a minimum of 30. This quarantine period can also be used to watch your animal to ensure they are settling in properly- drinking sufficient water (and you can note their favorite trough), learning how to navigate the hay net, adjusting to your particular hay, having regular bowel movements, and you can start them on a psyllium regimen. All of these activities may be more difficult for a new owner to note if they are in a pen with multiple donkeys.

- BLM animals from holding:** These animals will have been dewormed, vaccinated, and have Coggins tests done before leaving holding. These are largely considered low-risk animals. If you are getting a BLM animal from a TIP trainer, ask them what their quarantine protocols are, and what animals they

may have coming and going from their property to ascertain if you need to categorize the animals leaving their facility as high or low risk.

- Sale barn, kill pen, or rescue animals: These are considered the highest risk category. It is essential for the safety of your herd that these animals be quarantined away from the other equids on your property for at least 30 days. If the animals show any sign of illness they should remain in quarantine for 30 days *after* all symptoms have resolved. BRAY also recommends that you take this time to discuss a vaccination plan with your veterinarian. Animals should be quarantined a minimum of 60 feet from other animals and should not share common spaces such as turnouts, tack areas, or wash racks. Additionally you should not share wheelbarrows or muck rakes, or introduce animals to one another or let guests or friends touch the quarantined animal. It is typically easiest to end your daily chores with the quarantined animal before proceeding to change and wash your clothes and shower. Never go from your quarantined animal's pen to your herd without washing your hands and changing or sanitizing your clothes and shoes.
- Private owner-to-owner sales: These can run the gamut from low risk to extremely high risk. If you are very new to equids and don't yet trust your own judgment on the matter you can bring an equine-savvy friend or ask your vet for guidance on how to proceed. If the animal comes from a vet-positive friend with whom you regularly trail ride and use their trailer? Your animals are already intermingled; your quarantine may simply be a couple days of settle-in time, primarily looking out for things like water and feed consumption (donkeys can be picky). If the previous owner is a Craigslist contact who sells 3-12 head of various livestock of unknown provenance every week all from the same filthy pen? You will want to do a full 30+ day quarantine.

## Donkey Maintenance

Your donkey is home and thriving. You've done your research and have covered all the basics, now what? Now is when you start working on maintenance. Just like a horse, donkeys need routine veterinary, dental, and hoof care, at the same intervals as a horse: biannually, annually, and every 5-8 weeks, respectively.

- Veterinary care: After you establish your donkey as a patient with your favorite veterinarian, it's time to get on their books for routine care. As always, ask your veterinarian what they recommend for your particular animal, as they are all unique; typical veterinary care includes vaccines and parasite monitoring and prevention in the spring and autumn. When you make your appointment be sure to tell your vet what you do with your donkey, any events you attend, and anywhere you plan to vacation with your donkey. They will use this information to develop a vaccination protocol for your animal. Depending on what you do with your donkey such as attending BRAY events, traveling out of state, boarding at particular facilities, or some shows, you will need to have blood drawn yearly for a Coggins/EIA test. Even if your donkey does not leave your property you may choose to do this for surveillance. If your donkey is an intact jack, that is they still have their testicles, speak with your vet about gelding them as soon as it is safe to do so. Many vets will choose not to geld an animal in the heat of the summer. Jack donkeys can be incredibly dangerous and have been known to maim or even kill people, pets, and other livestock. Unless you have significant experience with donkeys and have a proper breeding operation, you should castrate jacks as soon as possible for your safety and their emotional well being.
- Dental care: Just like a horse, most donkeys will need to have a routine dental exam and possible float once a year. Most people choose to do this during their appointment for spring or autumn vaccines, but if you bring your new donkey home and notice they appear to have trouble chewing, "quidding"

(dropping feed), nasal discharge, or foul odor from the nose or mouth, you likely need to schedule a dental visit as soon as possible. Even if you have a young donkey who still has its “baby teeth” you should still ask your veterinarian about a dental exam. They will often do a cursory, un-sedated exam just to ensure they don’t need to further address any issues. During your donkey’s dental exam be sure to tell your vet if you are, or are planning to, use a bit for driving or riding, as this may affect how they proceed with treatment.

- Hoof care: Donkeys, like horses, must receive routine farrier care. While donkeys typically don’t wear shoes they will still require a trim and balance from time to time. Your interval between trims will vary from animal to animal and with your footing in your donkey’s pen, their activity level, their nutrition, and the weather. However it is good to factor in a trim or balance every 5-8 weeks to start. With the shortage of farriers, and even fewer who are happy to work on donkeys, it is wise to do what you can to keep your farrier happy.
  - Scheduling: Keep to the schedule they prefer, within reason, even if you feel the donkey could go longer or shorter between trims. Be mindful that farriers have many moving parts to juggle with their clients. If they have you on a six week rotation you may find they will stop returning your calls if you disrupt their books by trying to change your intervals to seven weeks, then eight weeks, then seven again simply because it’s winter time and they are trimming less hoof at six weeks. Let them know at least 2-3 weeks out if you will be unable to make an appointment, for instance if you will be traveling with your donkey during their next scheduled trim.
  - Price: A quality trim will typically cost between \$50 and \$65. It may be more if you live in a remote location or if your animal is difficult to work with. Do not assume miniature donkey trims cost less than standard donkey trims. Typically miniatures are the same price, as travel costs, tool and vehicle depreciation, training, and experience are all worked into the price of a trim.
  - Be polite: Have your donkeys caught and standing ready for the farrier when they arrive. It is not their job to chase your donkey around the paddock. Work with your donkey in between farrier sessions so they are comfortable with their hooves being handled. You can use various everyday items to simulate tools, like a body brush, a wooden spoon, etc.
  - Location: Have a safe place for your farrier to work, and do your best to make it as comfortable as possible for your farrier and your donkey. It should be shaded or covered, all manure should be removed from the area before your farrier arrives, there should be a sturdy place to tie your donkey, and it should be free of debris such as rakes, wheelbarrows, water troughs, toys, etc. Ideally it is also on firm, level ground. A box fan in the summer is often appreciated as well to help keep your donkey and the farrier cool, and minimize flies.

## Donkey Essentials

You’ve picked out the perfect companion, and can hardly contain your excitement over your new burro bestie, now comes the fun part: shopping for the essentials you’ll need before you bring them home!

- Quality, low sugar, low calorie grass hay
- Clean, quality straw. Barley straw is what is typically suggested, although wheat straw is safe for donkeys with good teeth.
- A slow feed hay net. These can be found at your local feed store, haychix.com or thehaypillow.com
- A water trough, or better yet several water troughs
- A salt source

- A halter and lead rope. A cotton lead rope is suggested to start with, especially if your donkey is not well trained to lead. Cotton is less likely to cause friction/rope burns. BRAY prefers a nylon strap halter to a rope halter, unless the person you're getting the donkey from, such as a TIP trainer, says otherwise. Remember: do not leave halters on unattended animals. If you must leave a halter on a new arrival until they are more easily handled, be sure it's a breakaway halter and NEVER leave a rope halter on a loose animal.
- A hoof pick
- A medium stiffness body brush (at minimum, a soft brush for removing fine dust, polishing your donkey's coat, and bonding via gentle face brushing, and a stiff brush for removing mud are also fairly useful)
- A water trough scrubbing brush or scrub pad
- A fly mask
- A shedding tool if it's spring or early summer. Weaver makes a fabulous livestock slicker comb; slicker stones and curry combs may also work, depending on your donkey's hair texture

## CHAPTER 3: FEEDING YOUR DONKEY

It can be difficult for new owners to navigate the labyrinth that is the feed store or hay broker's lot. It seems every product and package is specially designed to let you know it's the best and only choice for your animal. The following section is here to help new owners make a little more sense of what they are seeing, and to be able to make an informed decision. Of course it's always recommended that you speak to your veterinarian when developing a feeding plan or adding in new feeds or supplements, and always read the label on feeds and supplements.

### Feed Basics

**Concentrates:** Concentrates refer to livestock feeds that are rich in energy and/or protein but low in fiber, such as corn, soybean meal, oats, wheat, etc. Concentrated feeds are colloquially referred to in most of the equine world as “grain”. These include pelleted equine feeds like SafeChoice or Strategy, as well as all stock feeds like COB mix or Sweet 10, or simply whole grains like oats or barley.

**Forage:** Forage refers to plants or plant parts other than separated grains fed to or grazed by domestic animals. Forage may be fresh, dry or ensiled (e.g., pasture, green chop, hay, haylage). Most equines in Arizona receive their daily forage as either hay (cut, dried, and cured), or pasture (actively growing grasses and plants).

**Binders:** Many processed or pelleted feeds will use “binders” such as molasses to keep the pellets together, and increase palatability (flavor). It is important to look at the ingredients statement on your bag of feed to see what may be used as a binder to ensure you're not adding unneeded sugars and concentrates to your donkeys' diet; many grass hay pellets use molasses as a binder, but some do not.

**Processing:** Animal feeds may be processed in many ways, and for several reasons; usually either as a way to ensure safe storage in order to retain nutrition and prevent spoiling —most often seen in baled hay, or to make a product more easily and efficiently digested, thereby reducing waste. Increasing digestibility is typically done through processes that increase the surface area of a feed, which allows for gut bacteria to break down the feed more quickly. Think of it like this: a piece of sugar rock candy will dissolve in a cup of hot tea much more slowly than granulated sugar. In fact, you're much more likely to see chunks of sugar still remaining in the bottom of your tea cup, undissolved, if you sweeten your tea with rock sugar rather than granulated sugar. In the same way, one kernel of corn is more quickly digested if ground into cornmeal as opposed to as a whole kernel because cornmeal will have more surface area for bacteria to begin the digestion process. As many of us know, it's not atypical to see whole, unprocessed grains pass through to manure fully undigested.

### **Processing**

It is important to understand the various ways feeds can be processed to ensure the safety of your long ears. Types of processing commonly seen in Arizona are:

**Hay:** Herbage, and especially grass, mowed and cured for fodder. Hay is covered in more detail later in this chapter, but most of us are familiar with our dried hay bales from which we feed our donkeys.

**Silage/haylage:** Feed preserved by anaerobic fermentation. Silage and haylage is most often used for dairy cattle in Arizona, although you may see plastic wrapped bales of haylage marketed toward horses at your local

feed store. The fermentation process helps to break down and “pre-digest” some of the plant materials in the feed so the animals may more efficiently digest plant structures such as cellulose.

**Rolling or steam flaking:** These methods are both designed to make grains more digestible. By rolling them flat with rollers or using steam to soften and split the pericarp (outside shell), you increase the surface area for gut microbes to digest the grains, as well as allow them access to the more digestible inner portions of the grains. You may be familiar with this process when considering rolled oats, like you may use to make oatmeal, versus whole oats.

**Grinding:** Grains and seeds can be ground to increase digestibility. After grinding they may be left as-is such as ground flax, or extruded into a pellet, either on their own, like rice bran pellets, or mixed with other grains and products, such as the above-mentioned SafeChoice and Strategy.

**Chopping:** Hay products may also be chopped to increase digestibility and make for easier storage. You will most often find chopped hay either in plastic wrapped small bales, or extruded into pellets or cubes. Many donkey owners are familiar with alfalfa cubes and grass or alfalfa pellets, which are often used as training treats and rewards.

### **Making A Feeding Plan**

As donkeys are incredibly efficient with their feed, and most domestic donkeys are more sedentary than their wild relatives have evolved to be, donkey owners generally want to do the opposite of most livestock owners and feed their donkeys as *inefficiently* as possible. This means minimizing concentrated feeds and heavily processed feeds, like grains and pellets, and seeking out forages with low nutritional density like grasses and straw. Of course the one rule of animal feeding is that not all animals are the same, so while the vast majority of domestic donkeys do well on limited grasses and clean straw for browsing, there will be times your animals may need additional nutrition and/or calories. These instances may include: during times of very cold weather, while pregnant or nursing, while growing, or when being worked heavily. Additionally, some animals may simply have a particularly fast metabolism and require additional feed. In these instances you may choose to ask your vet for feeding guidance to ensure your animal is getting a properly balanced ration for their needs.

### **Hay**

It is a common misconception that “hay” refers to a specific forage for hoofstock, when actually hay is better described as a process, similar to flour, in that one can purchase wheat flour, oat flour, coconut flour, almond flour, etc, and all will have different nutritional properties. In fact, some of the most popular choices for equine hay in Arizona are typically not the same class of plant: Alfalfa is a legume. Bermuda grass is, as the name suggests, a grass, while oat hay is from a cereal grain. When it is said “feed your donkeys only hay” that can leave significant room for incorrect interpretation

In order for a green crop to become hay it must undergo three steps:

1. cutting
2. drying (curing)
3. storing (baling, pellets, etc)

Again, it's important to remember owners will often see it written that they should feed "low quality hay and forage." Please note when this is stated the authors mean the hay and forage is a plant or plant part that is naturally low in sugars, calories, and/or carbohydrates, NOT that donkeys can or should be fed hay that's dusty, moldy, or full of weeds. If your hay is dusty, moldy, weedy, or contains debris or plant matter which could injure your donkey (such as goat heads, burrs, foxtail, excessive trash, toxic or unidentified plants), discard the hay and do not feed it to your animals or use it for bedding.

## Hay vs Straw

When discussing hay not only is the process important, but the timing as well. For cereal grains such as wheat, barley, or oats, what is commonly referred to as wheat *hay*, barley *hay*, or oat *hay* would typically be the grasses cut and dried *before* the plant produces seeds (concentrates). This will cause the hay to retain a higher level of nutrients. If the crop is allowed to mature further, until the grains have had a chance to develop and ripen, the resulting forage (sans grains) is typically referred to as wheat, barley, or oat *straw*, is considered a byproduct of grain production, and will have a lower nutrient density than the wheat, barley, or oat hay, as most of the nutrition from the plant will have been stored in the grains.

In Arizona, there are two contenders for the most popular hay in the equine world: bermuda grass hay and alfalfa hay. There are many other types of hay such as: timothy grass, orchard grass, clover, teff grass, sudan grass, wheat, rye, oat, triticale, fescue, brome, and bluegrass. However it's important to note not all of these are a suitable or safe choice for donkeys.

## Types of Hay

When selecting a hay type for your donkey there is a lot to consider, but donkey owners must keep in mind: nutrient dense feed requires less volume and donkeys are extremely efficient at processing nutrients from the feed they consume; and don't forget straw is in a class of its own.

Hay can be broken down into two main types: legume or grass. Of course there are mixes of the two also available in nearly any combination.

**Legume hay:** Includes alfalfa and clover. When compared to grass hay, legumes are higher in protein, energy, calcium and vitamin A; ultimately they're considered nutrient dense hay. Per pound legume hay offers more calories than grass hay.

- Alfalfa:** The most well known legume hay and one of the most common types of hay available in Arizona. Alfalfa hay has to be fed with some care because of its high calcium level in relation to phosphorus. It is known for a high protein content (ranges from 15% to 22%). Donkey owners are typically counseled to not feed alfalfa hay. As with many feeding guidelines, it is slightly more nuanced than that: for the vast majority of domestic donkeys, their nutritional requirements are best met with grass hays and straw, while possibly including an herb mix or ration balancer to fill in any nutritional gaps. However some owners may choose to safely include very small amounts of alfalfa in their animal's diet, for instance when using occasional alfalfa or alfalfa blend pellets for a high reward training treat. Others may have been instructed by their vet to feed limited alfalfa as a portion of their animal's ration if they are underweight, working particularly hard, in the latter stages of pregnancy or

nursing, growing, or in especially cold climates. Owners who have obese animals (in the United States donkeys are MUCH more likely to be obese than underweight) or animals who are prone to metabolic disorders such as founder and laminitis should carefully avoid alfalfa altogether as it can exacerbate these issues.

- Clover:** Another legume hay, though typically it is mixed with other hay types in a bale. Like alfalfa it has a high protein range, however, caution needs to be used with clover as it is prone to mold more than other hay and can cause excessive slobbering in some animals. Like alfalfa, donkey owners should likely avoid feeding clover unless they have been instructed to do so by their veterinarian as in most cases it is too nutritionally dense.

**Grass hay:** This includes bermuda, timothy, orchard, teff, brome, bluegrass, oat, rye, sudan, triticale, and fescue. Grass hays are less nutritionally dense than legumes, higher in fiber, and typically what is recommended for donkeys as a main part of their diet. However, not all of these grasses are suitable or safe for donkeys. Sudan, rye, and fescue are typically avoided as they can come with some dangers, which we will discuss at the end of this chapter.

- Bermuda:** The most common grass hay grown in Arizona. This grass grows extremely well in the Southwest and is most common for Arizona donkey owners to feed, alongside straw. It has a protein content generally around 6%-11%, and is generally low in sugars (non-structural carbohydrates, or NSCs). The long, fibrous nature of this hay can increase chances of gastrointestinal obstruction if donkeys do not have adequate dental care. If you feed Bermuda hay it is essential that they receive adequate dental care.
- Teff:** A popular choice, as teff grows well in the desert. Teff, being a warm season grass, will typically be lower in sugars and protein, similar to bermuda grass.
- Timothy and Orchard Grass:** These are readily available at many feed stores in pellets and compressed bales. These grasses are similarly low in protein, but as a cold season grass they will often be higher in sugars. Of course this means laminitic or animals with metabolic disorders should avoid these choices altogether, and limiting their consumption by healthy animals is generally the safest choice.

If warm weather grasses are difficult to source in your area there are options to mitigate the sugars that are present in cold weather grasses, but as always, if you are unsure about feeding a particular hay you should consult with your vet:

- Slow feed hay nets:** The slower your animal eats, the better, so all the sugars aren't hitting their system at once. Slow feed nets, such as those on haypillow.com allow for meal time to become an activity that lasts significantly longer than feeding loose hay. You may also choose to mix your hay with straw, either in the nets or loose. Your donkeys will either eat the two forages at once, balancing the high sugars in your hay with the low sugar straw, or they will slow down as they search through the straw to pick out pieces of hay. Hay nets should be hung off the ground to avoid entanglement, and should not be used with shod animals, or if your donkey shares space with any horned animals such as goats or cattle.

- Soaking:** Submerging your hay in water and leaving it to soak for 30 minutes to two hours, followed by pouring off and discarding the water (your plants may enjoy it), can reduce the sugar content of your hay further. Take caution to not feed soaked hay over sand, as it will cause your donkey to eat sand-coated hay that falls to the ground. If you have a metabolic or laminitic donkey and soaking your hay has been recommended, consider purchasing a stall mat on which to feed. Take care that it is placed in the shade, as afternoon summer sun can cause the black rubber to become too hot for your animal to comfortably stand on. Any uneaten soaked hay should be carefully removed before the next feeding to prevent spoilage. While there are hay steamers on the market, steaming hay does not produce the same results as soaking it.

## Danger Hay

Not all hay is good hay. Some hay is good for other livestock, but not for donkeys. Some bales in a stack are safe to feed, while others are not.

It is essential to know the type of hay you are feeding. Some hay may be hazardous to some animals in your herd, but not all of your herd. Fescue, for example, can cause abortion or stillbirths in pregnant jennies. However endophyte-free fescue can be safely fed (although owners should be cautious of its higher sugar content). Additionally, some hay, for example Sudan, may be safe if grown under certain climate conditions, but can cause cyanide poisoning if stressed by events such as freezing during the growing cycle. Cold season grasses including rye, orchard, and timothy can be especially high in sugars and rye in particular can be problematic for this reason, causing metabolic issues including laminitis. Others, namely legumes such as alfalfa, are not necessarily toxic to your donkeys, but are often too nutrient-dense and overfeeding them can result in founder, laminitis, and obesity.

Knowing where hay is sourced is important for understanding the safety of the hay. A buyer can find this information by asking the grower, broker or feed store. Once they have identified where the hay is grown they can familiarize themselves with common dangerous or toxic conditions, plants, and pests in the area, and keep an eye out when feeding their animals.. For instance: hay grown in the desert southwest may have a higher chance of containing goathead thorns (which will cause pain to your animals AND cause these noxious weeds to gain a foothold on your property), dodder, or even sometimes oleander leaves, as these are popular for landscaping in hot and arid regions. Meanwhile, pasture grown grasses such as what one may find in Utah or Colorado may occasionally have high levels of nitrates due to runoff containing animal waste such as cow manure pooling in certain areas, or could have become toxic due to growing conditions such as freezing. It's important to note that some of these problems can occur only in some areas of the field, and therefore testing a single bale will not necessarily give you a full picture of the safety of a stack of hay.

**Harvesting, handling, and storage:** these can affect the safety of the hay, and the following are all things to consider when sourcing hay, as reputable growers will take precautions against their product being adversely affected, and while storing your hay so as to ensure it doesn't spoil:

- When hay is baled before it is sufficiently dried/cured, or if it is rained on after it is cut or baled, it can become moldy and unsuitable for feeding. Take care to cover hay stacks, either by storing it in a barn or shed with a cover, or by covering it with a plastic tarp when rain is forecasted.
- If a haystack is left for significant periods in sandy areas it may become contaminated with excessive blowing sand or dust. Ideally, choose an area with minimal sand and dust to store hay, but if this is not

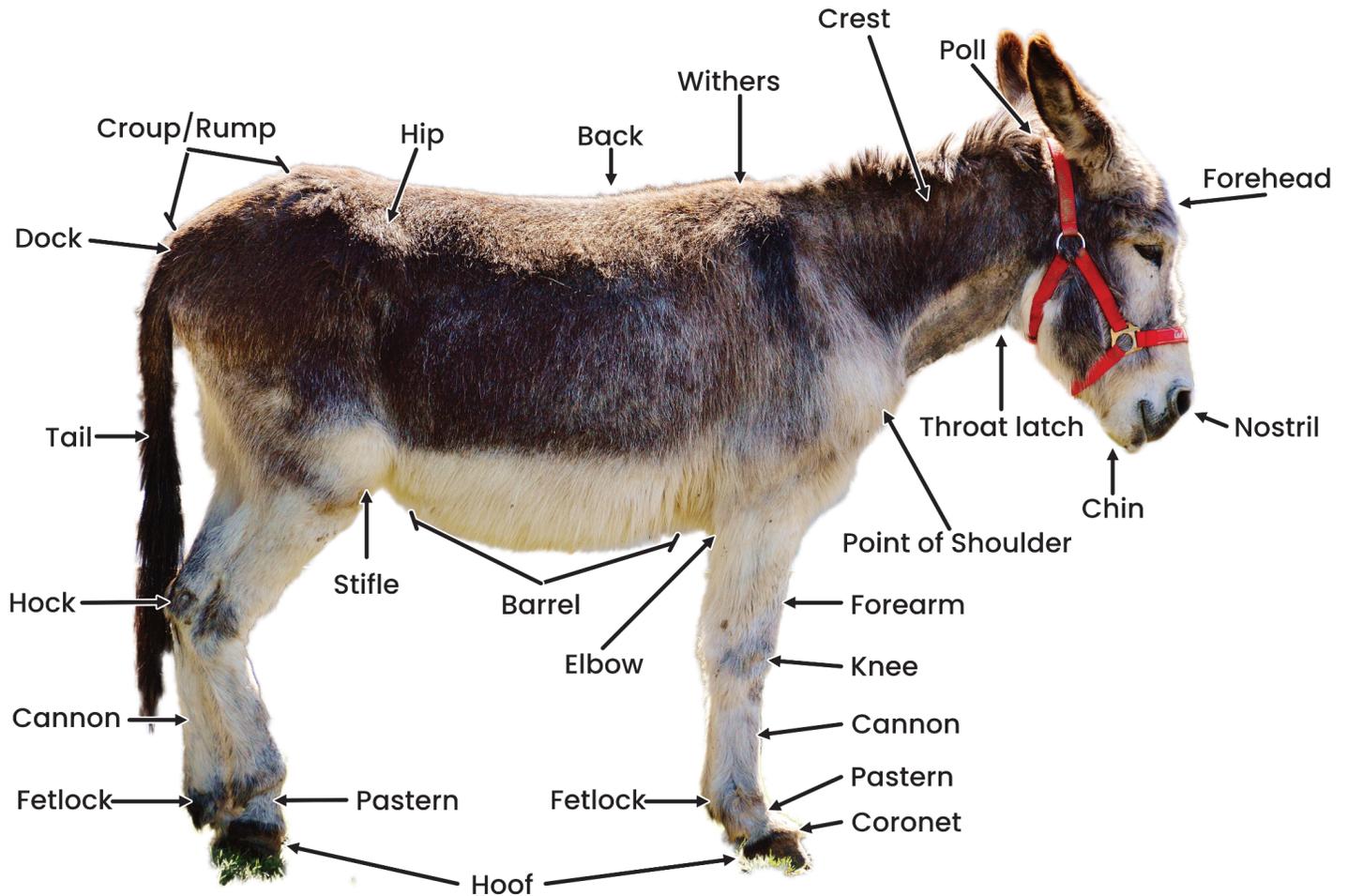
an option, tarps or windbreaks made of various materials like plywood or even old, unusable hay bales (placed around stack, not touching it), may minimize sand contamination.

- Bales on the bottom of a stack will often be contaminated with mold, as moisture on the ground becomes trapped against the bales. Storing hay on wooden pallets can help to avoid or minimize this.
- If the field where the hay is grown is adjacent to busy roads or highways it may have a higher instance of contamination with trash and litter. Occasional trash, like a paper cup or plastic bag, is to be expected of products grown outside. Care should be taken to remove these items before feeding the hay as they can cause choking, impaction, or colic if they are consumed. If hay routinely has a particularly high occurrence of trash, it may be time to seek another source.
- Hay from fields near forests, woods, or riparian areas may have a higher instance of animal intrusion and therefore a higher chance of said animals (most often rodents, rabbits, snakes, toads, and birds) being baled in the hay. If you find an animal carcass, or portions of a carcass, in your hay, discard the hay immediately surrounding the carcass, as it can be contaminated with any number of illnesses, such as botulism, associated with rot and decay. Take special care, and consider discarding a greater hay buffer, around snakes or toads, as they are often venomous or poisonous and that venom or poison may be on the adjacent hay.
- Green chop hay, which is hay harvested and then fed immediately with no drying, and grass clippings may seem like an easy feed source, but both of these products can cause a number of problems; the moisture can allow the hay or clippings to spoil very rapidly causing various toxicities and colic, and the ease of consumption (donkeys can grab massive mouthfuls with little resistance) can cause them to rapidly overeat and founder or colic.
- Silage, with its high moisture content, has a higher instance of toxins such as botulinum, if it is not properly stored and fermented.
- Alfalfa, aside from typically being too nutrient rich to be a significant forage source for donkeys, may harbor blister beetles. Blister beetles are an insect containing cantharidin (a burning agent/poison) that causes blistering on human skin, or the muzzles, mouths, and intestinal tracts of livestock that consume them. They tend to seek out alfalfa blossoms as a food source. Blister beetle consumption can cause painful lesions, depression, laminitis, and colic.

Not all of the issues with various hays can be seen with the naked eye, some can only be discovered via laboratory testing, or will be noted after feeding the hay to your animals causes an adverse health event. This is why it's important to know what type of hay is being fed, to only purchase hay from a reputable source, and understand the risks of certain types of hay and forage. While seeing 15 bales of hay on Craigslist for sale for \$8 apiece may seem very tempting, it's unwise to put animals at risk to save money. Alternately, owners may know certain hays come with risks, but you choose to mitigate that through rigorous laboratory testing, or by not feeding that particular hay to at-risk animals.

## CHAPTER 4: DONKEY VETERINARY BASICS

### Basic Donkey Anatomy



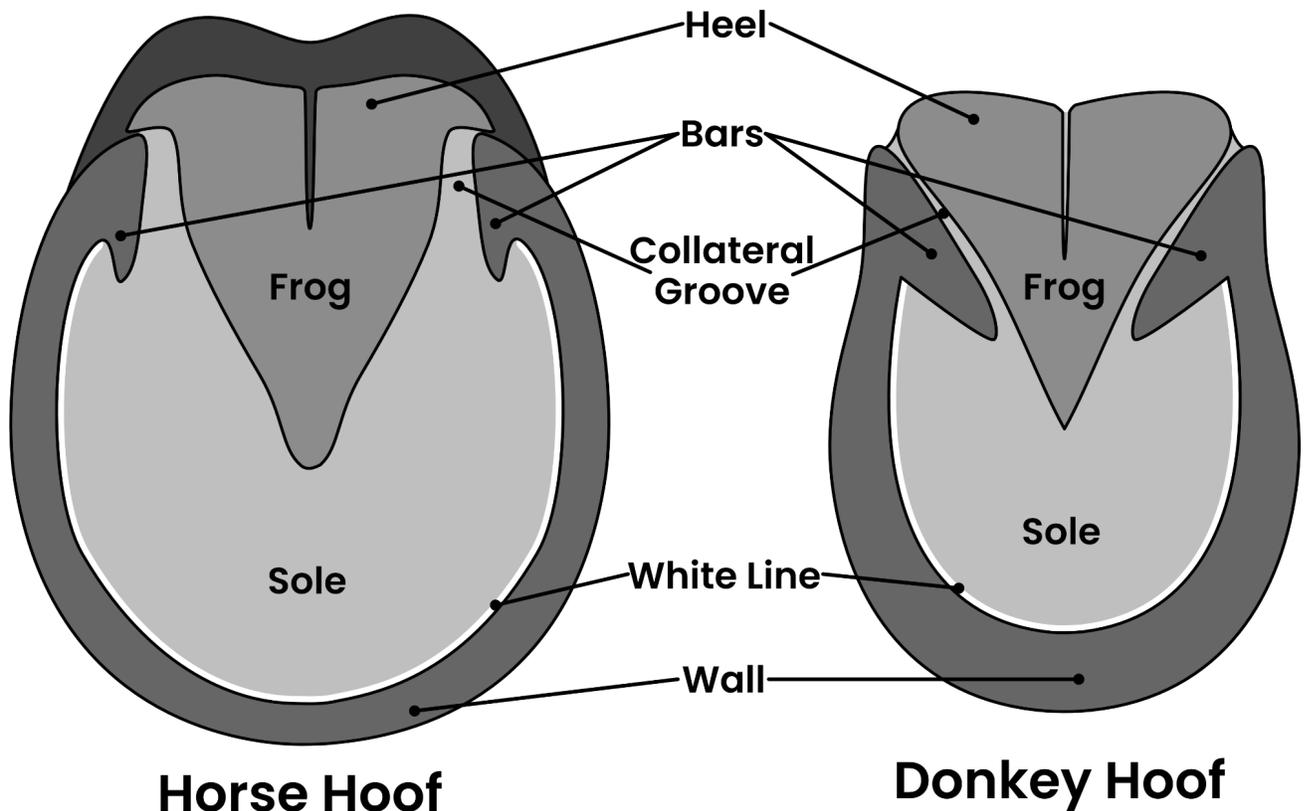
You will often hear people say “donkeys are not just horses with long ears.” This is because they differ from horses in many key ways. Some of these include:

- Donkey’s nasal passages are narrower than those of a horse of the same size.
- Administering intravenous (IV) medications can be more difficult as the jugular vein is covered by the cutaneous coli muscle.
- Donkey’s teeth vary slightly from horses, making them more difficult to age by dentition.

- Donkeys have slightly different baseline vitals than a horse.

	<b>Temperature</b>	<b>Heart Rate</b> (beats per minute)	<b>Respiratory Rate</b> (breaths per minute)
<b>Adult</b>	97.2 - 100.0°F	38 - 48 bpm	12 - 28 rpm
<b>Young</b>	97.0 - 102.0°F	40 - 80 bpm	16 - 48 rpm
<b>Foal</b>	99.5 - 101.3°F	80 - 120 bpm	60 - 80 rpm

- Donkeys will typically weigh less than a horse of the same height, and cannot be weighed using a horse weight tape. The best way to weigh a donkey is on a scale at your vet's or a truck scale.
- As with horses, donkeys have chestnuts on the inside of their legs, by their knees. Unlike horses, their chestnuts shed in little papery flakes, and are only on the front legs. They also have ergots, a similar structure on the point of the fetlock.
- Donkey's hoof shape is overall more narrow than that of a horse in addition to having a "U" shape that indents towards the hoof bars before flaring out towards the heel. This can make fitting a hoof-boot on a donkey more difficult than fitting a horse as most hoof-boots are designed with the more circular horse hoof in mind. If you're used to a horse's hooves you'll notice that the collateral groove is also different on a donkey; it sits more on the side of the hooves than to the rear.

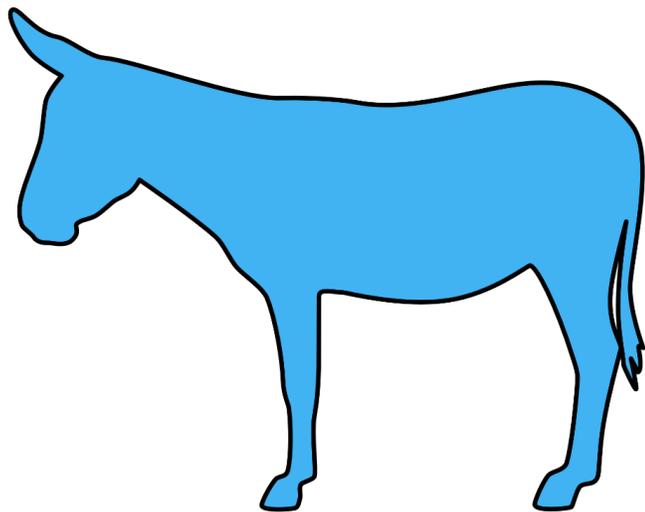


## Common donkey health issues and how to approach them

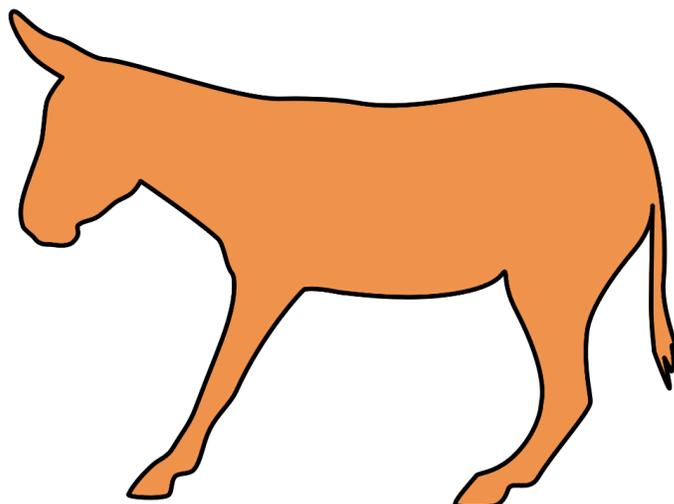
**Obesity:** Unfortunately obesity is one of the most common donkey health issues seen. It is important for their health and comfort that an owner not allow a donkey to become obese. Donkeys are shaped differently than horses, and their body condition scoring will reflect those minor differences. For instance a donkey of a healthy weight will not have significant muscling in the chest, shoulder, or rump as a horse would have. It is perfectly healthy for a donkey, especially one who is not working, to have an angular hip and shoulder. If your donkey is obese it's important to take steps to rectify the issues as soon as possible. Rehabilitation from obesity must be done very slowly and deliberately, so the sooner you begin, the sooner you can have a healthy donkey. Be sure to speak to your vet before beginning a weight loss regimen for your donkey. They can help ascertain what your donkey's goal weight should be, help develop a feeding plan, and may want to take a blood sample as your donkey's weight loss journey progresses to ensure they don't enter a state of hyperlipemia - where fat begins to enter the bloodstream and can cause serious complications or death. When you are assisting your donkey on its weight loss journey it is important to ensure they are not often without food. It may seem counterintuitive but a lack of food can hinder weight loss and cause other problems such as gastric ulcers, insulin spikes, and the aforementioned hyperlipemia. Free choice barley straw is a good option for your donkey between meals to keep their hunger at bay and to help prevent boredom.

**Fly Strike:** Surprisingly donkeys tend to have fairly sensitive skin as compared to their horse cousins. Fly strike and self mutilation are sadly a common occurrence in donkeys, This occurs when flies bite the donkeys, and the donkeys often respond by biting, chewing, or rubbing the affected area, causing weeping and bleeding, which in turn attracts more flies. Fly strike most commonly occurs on the lower legs of the donkey but anywhere can be impacted. Generally fly strike can be treated at home, but it's important to keep a close eye on your donkeys during fly season so you can respond quickly. Prevention, in this case using fly spray, fly masks, fly boots or tube socks, and possibly fly blankets to prevent fly strike from occurring is much easier than treating the problem. If you notice that your donkey has exposed skin, sores, or weeping wounds they will need to be treated then protected immediately to prevent the fly strike from getting worse.

**Laminitis/Founder:** Laminitis and founder are inflammation within the hooves of equids which can result in the internal separation of the bone from the hoof wall. Most often in donkeys they are caused by rich feeds, but they can also result from too much shock to the lower limbs, like trotting for miles on asphalt, or standing still for prolonged periods of time, such as on long trailer rides. Signs of both include elevated temperature and pulse in the hooves, painful hooves, and the animals may rock back onto their hind hooves and extend the front feet in an effort to relieve pressure on the front hooves. Both laminitis and founder are veterinary emergencies. You need to contact your veterinarian immediately if you suspect either. Laminitis is especially insidious, as once a donkey experiences a laminitic episode they are more likely to recur. Severe and/or persistent laminitis can even cause resorption of the coffin bones within the hooves.



Normal Donkey Stance



Laminitic Donkey Stance

Left: A donkey in a normal stance with weight balanced across the entire hoof on all four feet.

Right: A donkey showing the “saw-horse stance” associated with laminitis as they try to alleviate pressure on the front hooves or front of hooves if present in all four feet.



A radiograph (x-ray) showing resorption of the coffin bone.

**Colic:** Colic is a catch-all term for abdominal discomfort in equids. It can cover everything from discomfort and distension due to gas, to impactions and torsions that can lead to tissue necrosis. Signs of colic include lack of appetite (look out for “sham eating” with donkeys. They will pretend to eat, even going so far as to hold feed in their mouth and chew, only to let it fall out again.) restlessness, kicking at their belly, looking at their belly or flank, biting at their sides/belly/flank, increased respiration, sweating, hanging their head, avoiding the herd, and rolling. If you suspect your donkey is colicking the first thing to do is check and note their vital signs. Count the amount of breaths they take in one minute, take their temperature if they will allow you to, count their pulse rate. If they will allow it, you can halter them and take them for a short walk, about 5-10 minutes, to see if that helps symptoms subside. Sometimes gas is the culprit and all they need is a short walk to release it. They may also display colic-like symptoms if they have been particularly cold, and a walk can help warm them up. If the

symptoms don't improve after a short walk, remove their feed from the pen, separate them into a clean pen or stall if you can (you will need to note any bowel movements) and call your vet for further instructions. Even if you feel the colic is at this point not severe, it is always best to call your vet early on in the event, and make them aware of the issue. For instance, depending on their schedule of the day they may recommend slightly more aggressive treatment to a wait-and-see, or have you bring your animal into the clinic for observation for the day, if their afternoon is going to be filled with taking the emergency shift for the clinic and they know they won't be able to do a farm visit to see a worsening animal in six hours time. Donkeys may also show colic symptoms in a way that is more subtle than a horse. They may be at their hay station, sham eating. They may also demonstrate a dullness that is out of character, by not greeting you as quickly or as joyously as they typically do, or by quietly laying down when they are typically up and about. It's important not to dismiss these signs as they may be early indications something is amiss.

- Impaction Colic:** Impactions can be caused by many things, such as dental disease, parasites, scabrous feed, or ingestion of foreign substances such as trash, mesquite beans, mulch, or in some cases their own shed hair. For this reason it's important to do your best to remove fallen tree debris, any hair you brush out of your donkey from their pen or paddock, and always remove any trash you may find. Impaction colic can also be caused by dehydration. It's important to keep your donkey's water troughs clean and filled to prevent dehydration. Owners will also want to keep a close eye on their animals especially during times of extreme weather, such as extreme heat or cold, or as seasons change. All of these events can lead to changes in water consumption, which can lead to impaction colic.
- Sand Colic:** While sand colic is a form of impaction colic, it is caused by animals ingesting sand and therefore the prevention methods are slightly different. Most importantly owners should do their best to prevent ingestion by not feeding hay directly on sand. Hang your slow feed bag over an empty trough or bucket, or over a stall mat that is routinely swept off. Additionally, psyllium should be fed to your donkeys for one week per month, as directed on the container. Psyllium helps to clear the digestive tract of any sand your animal may have ingested before it has a chance to accumulate into a blockage, and is a helpful preventative to be used hand in hand with feeding practices to prevent ingestion in the first place

**Choke:** Just like humans, donkeys can choke. Unlike with humans, when a donkey chokes they can still typically breathe, even though they have an obstruction. Signs of choke include not eating, restlessness, pawing, pacing, extending the head and neck, excessive drooling, or feed being expelled from their nose. If you see any of these signs remove any food your donkey may still have access to and call your veterinarian immediately. Some donkeys will be able to clear the choke on their own, but you must still be on the lookout for aspiration pneumonia (where foreign objects, in this case bits of feed, are inhaled into the lungs causing pneumonia). In other instances the vet may need to treat your donkey by giving sedatives or muscle relaxants and gently flushing the obstruction from the esophagus. Dry hay pellets and cubes are often a cause of choke, as they tend to absorb saliva and expand within the esophagus. Another common cause of choke is poor dentition. If your donkey has choked they can be more prone to doing so again in the future. Animals who are lower in the herd hierarchy can also be at risk of choke due to rushed eating. Having sufficient feed stations for your herd can help alleviate this issue.

**Sunburn:** As mentioned, donkeys with white spots and pink skin are more prone to sunburn than donkeys with dark skin. Oil based fly sprays can also exacerbate sunburn. If you have a donkey with pink skin it's important to cover the skin as much as possible, such as using a fly mask with a long nose, a fly sheet, or fly boots on white legs, and do not clip or shave the donkey unless you absolutely must, such as for a medical procedure or

show. As with humans, prolonged exposure to UV rays can cause animals, especially pink-skinned animals, to develop certain cancers.

**Malnutrition/underweight:** As donkeys are so incredibly thrifty, it's extremely uncommon for a donkey to be severely underweight, but if you encounter an underweight animal it's likely they can be slowly and safely brought back up to a healthy weight simply with grass hay fed in small meals several times a day (and free choice straw). Of course if the animal is emaciated and at risk for refeeding syndrome you should contact your veterinarian to guide you in safely rehabbing the animal.

**Sarcoids:** sarcoids are wart-like tumors, typically around the face, chest, and legs, of a donkey. They are related to bovine papilloma virus, and while they do not spread internally, they can cause issues with your donkey's wellbeing due to their location, often around the eyes, nose and mouth, and their propensity to tear, bleed, and generally cause disruption and discomfort. Do not attempt to remove or treat sarcoids yourself, this can cause them to spread. Sarcoids can be treated either by laser removal or creams, although treatments are not always successful. If you suspect a sarcoid, call your vet to create a treatment plan.

**Hoof Abscesses:** Hoof abscesses occur when bacteria gets into the hoof capsule and forms a pocket of infection. This can occur in many ways:

- Bacteria may infiltrate through the white line, causing abscesses. These happen more frequently when donkeys live in wet conditions. Wet footing can cause hooves to crack and split and allow bacteria to migrate through the weakened tissue.
- When the donkeys don't have the proper species appropriate diet to keep inflammation at bay, or when their feet are not trimmed and maintained at appropriate intervals, causing torsion on the white line, once again allowing an opportunity for bacteria to enter.

If your donkey is sound one day, then extremely painful on one leg the next, it's time to call your vet, you may have a hoof abscess. The good news is once an abscess is drained your donkey will feel near immediate relief, although you will still have to do aftercare as it grows out.

**White Line Disease:** White line disease (WLD) is caused by anaerobic bacteria that infiltrates the "white line" of the hoof. It can cause tissue death (necrosis) around the hoof under the hoof wall. It can be prevented by maintaining a proper trimming schedule, and ensuring your donkeys have clean, dry footing in their pen or pasture. The treatment for WLD is typically removing the affected hoof wall and allowing oxygen to reach the affected tissues.

Please also note many large animal veterinarians will not attend to an emergency call for an owner who is not an established client, which means they have seen at least one of your animals within the last 12 months. It is for this reason, if none other, that a good working relationship with a veterinarian is a must, and why even though you can buy vaccines at your local feed store it may be in your best interest to have a veterinarian administer them. It also may be beneficial to establish yourself at multiple veterinary practices. Ensure at least one of them will do farm calls and attend equine emergencies. There are some times of year, such as during heat waves, when animals tend to get sick across the whole area. If your vet is attending a colic across town they may not be able to come out to suture your animal's laceration. If that's the case you will be very thankful you visited a second vet clinic for health certificates for your most recent out of state travel, and to establish your herd as active patients.

## FantASStic Facts

The following is a collection of fun facts and “I wish I knew” collected from donkey owners and professionals such as veterinarians and farriers.

- ★ Donkeys do very well with positive reinforcement (R+) training, however you must be mindful of the amount of treats you give them. Once a bond is created, and they understand what you're asking of them, treats can be used only in extremely high value situations. Donkeys love learning and are often happy with a pat or scratch as a reward.
- ★ Donkeys shed their winter coat much later in the year than horses, and they shed very patchy. It's not parasites, it's just how donkeys do!
- ★ If someone is telling you something about donkeys that doesn't seem right, go research it! Trust your intuition, science, and experts over someone who has simply kept donkeys alive in a pasture for several years in a row.
- ★ Like all mammals, male donkeys have nipples. What surprises many new donkey owners is their location- typically situated toward the front of the sheath. If you spot these peculiar protrusions there's no need to call the vet, as long as they don't look injured or swollen.
- ★ “I wish I had known they are smarter than horses!”
- ★ “It's very easy to overfeed them! Feed low quality forage only!”
- ★ “A nice jack makes an amazing gelding.”
- ★ Many donkeys love a firm rump scratch. People who are used to horses may be taken aback when a friendly donkey starts approaching them rump-first, but they're likely just asking for scratches!

## Enjoy Your Donkey!

We hope this guide has proven beneficial, and you now feel more empowered to care for your donkeys in the best way possible. Don't forget! Donkeys love enrichment, seeing new things, and partaking in new activities, so please join us in our wonderful and rapidly growing Arizona donkey community, we'd love to have you join us!

## Glossary

**BLM:** Bureau of Land Management. The government agency typically in charge of the wild burros throughout the United States. Some herds may be on Forest Service land, in which case the US Forest Service is the agency charged with their stewardship.

**Burro:** A burro is the same animal as a donkey, but in Spanish. However in the western US the word “burro” often refers to wild or formerly wild (more accurately: feral) donkeys.

**EIA:** Equine Infectious Anemia. A bloodborne disease of equids, in the same family as HIV in humans. The test for this disease is a blood test typically referred to as a Coggins test. By federal law animals who are found to be positive for EIA must be kept quarantined several hundred yards from all other equids for life, or euthanized.

**Foal:** A baby donkey, generally under one year of age

**Gelding:** (Noun) A male donkey that has been castrated, or “gelded”. Often the terms “gelded jack” or “john” are used colloquially, although john properly identifies a mule gelding. (Verb) The act of castrating a male equid.

**Hay:** herbage, and especially grass, mowed and cured for fodder. In Arizona most donkeys are fed bermuda grass hay or teff grass hay. Alfalfa hay is typically not recommended for donkeys except under particular circumstances.

**Jack:** An uncastrated (intact) male donkey

**Jennet/Jenny:** a female donkey. While “jennet” is the correct term, jenny is heavily used colloquially.

**Mustang Heritage Foundation:** “The Mustang Heritage Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to facilitating successful placements of America’s excess wild horses and burros through innovative programs, events, and education.”

**Mammoth Donkey:** The largest size of donkey, any donkey over 56” at the wither

**Miniature Donkey:** Any donkey under 36” at the wither

**Standard Donkey:** Any donkey between 36” and 56” at the wither. The vast majority of BLM burros are standard donkeys.

**TIP:** “Trainer Incentive Program” which is a program by the Mustang Heritage Foundation (MHF) to encourage training and adoption of wild horses and burros.

**TIP Trainer:** A TIP trainer is a trainer registered through the MHF TIP program who is charged with teaching wild burros basic handling skills, who then receives a stipend from the MHF when the burro is adopted.

**Yearling:** a donkey between one and two years old.