

Feeding the Donkey

Donkeys require specialist feeding, they are not a small horse and should not be fed as such. They require fewer calories to maintain weight than a pony of the same size and enjoy highly fibrous feeds similar to those found in the natural habitat. Donkeys are particularly prone to obesity and laminitis when kept in the UK and need careful dietary management to avoid problems. The following is basic feeding advice for normal, healthy animals, if you require more specialist advice e.g. geriatric animals please contact us for further information:

DO'S

- Provide the donkey with good quality feeding straw (barley and oat are best) *ad lib* with small quantities of hay or haylage (see below).
- Condition score donkeys regularly, they are prone to weight gain which can predispose them to laminitis and hyperlipaemia.
- Feed according to body condition, restrict intake of energy rich feeds if the donkey is overweight but always ensure a source of fibre (e.g. straw) is available.
- Restrict grazing carefully, donkeys are very prone to laminitis and the quantity of grazing should be controlled by restricting the size of the paddock as well as time at grazing.
- Make changes to a donkey's diet very gradually over a period of 4-6 weeks.
- Ensure all supplementary feeds are high in fibre, low in calories and suitable for laminitics.

DON'TS

- Avoid all cereal based feeds, donkeys can be maintained and encouraged to gain weight on fibre based products without the need for inappropriate cereal feeds.
- Don't feed sugary treats, chopped apples, carrots and high fibre nuts are more suitable.
- Don't feed supplements unnecessarily, donkeys do not require dietary supplements unless recommended by a vet, supplements may in fact put donkeys off feed or over supplement nutrients leading to problems.
- Don't provide sugar based licks, these are often marketed as 'boredom breakers' but are not suitable for donkeys due to their high sugar content.
- Don't restrict total food intake to encourage weight loss, dieting should be done carefully using low calorie products in combination with exercise. Extreme dieting can put donkeys at risk of developing hyperlipaemia.

POSSIBLE DIETS

An average sized healthy, mature donkey will require 2-3 kg of feed per day to satisfy their appetites. In the majority of cases this should be solely provided by straw, hay and restricted grazing. A guideline is that straw should constitute 75% of the total dietary intake during summer months and 50% in the winter with hay and restricted grazing making up the balance. Supplementary feeds suitable for donkeys include:

- High Fibre Nuts e.g. Spillers High Fibre Nuts and Saracen's Donkey Diet
- Spillers Happy Hoof
- Speedi Beet – excellent as a 'top dressing' for fibre nuts
- Dengie 'Hi Fi' products, Hi Fi Lite and Good Doer are very suitable for donkeys