

Feeding Guidelines for Donkeys, Mules, and Hinnies

While related to horses, donkeys, mules, and hinnies have distinct dietary needs, primarily centered around a high-fiber, low-calorie intake to prevent health issues like obesity and laminitis.

1. Forage forms the basis of their diet

- Grass Hay and Straw:** Grass hay, such as timothy, orchard grass, or brome, is a suitable option, providing essential fiber for digestion. Straw, particularly barley straw, is also recommended, especially for donkeys and mules, to further increase fiber content and promote gut health. Donkeys tend to favor coarser grasses and may even browse on plants with tannins.
- Grazing:** While grazing can provide some forage, it's essential to manage grazing time carefully, especially on lush pastures, as it can lead to obesity and laminitis. Donkeys often prefer browsing when grazing is limited, consuming a variety of plants, potentially increasing the risk of ingesting poisonous plants.

2. Supplements and concentrates

- Vitamins and Minerals:** Healthy adult donkeys typically need a vitamin and mineral supplement, such as a forage balancer or an unmolassed equine-specific mineral lick, to ensure they receive all necessary nutrients.
- Concentrates:** Concentrates, such as grain or sweet feed, should be used sparingly and only when necessary, such as for working animals or those with specific needs determined by a veterinarian. Mules, in particular, should not be fed grain or cereal-based feeds. Concentrates high in starch and sugar are not recommended for mules.

3. Feeding management

- Free-Choice Forage:** Ideally, donkeys, mules, and hinnies should have free access to forage (hay/straw) throughout the day to mimic their natural grazing behavior.
- Divided Feedings:** When continuous forage access isn't feasible, divide the daily forage allowance into multiple feedings (2-3 times per day) to maintain continuous digestion.
- Monitoring Body Condition:** Regularly monitor body condition score and adjust feeding amounts as needed to prevent obesity or excessive weight loss.
- Fresh Water:** Ensure constant access to clean, fresh water.

4. Specific needs

- Mules:** Mules have similar dietary needs to donkeys, with a strong emphasis on high-fiber forage like straw and limited hay/grazing. They may require slightly less food than horses of comparable size.
- Hinnies:** Similar to mules, hinnies should be fed like donkeys, prioritizing straw, limited hay, and minimal grazing.
- Older Donkeys:** Donkeys over 20 may benefit from the addition of an equine senior feed to boost their system and provide necessary vitamins and minerals, always following the "feed to body weight" instructions on the product.

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5. Cautions

- Avoid Overfeeding:** Overfeeding, especially concentrates, can lead to obesity, laminitis, and other health issues.
- Donkeys and Mules are Hardy:** Donkeys and mules are known for their ability to digest poor quality, high-fiber feeds and can survive on less food than horses.
- Monitor Appetite:** A sudden drop in appetite can indicate a serious health problem, requiring immediate veterinary attention.
- Be Mindful of Treats:** Treats are not essential and overuse can lead to behavioral issues; prioritize love and positive reinforcement over food rewards.