

# FACTSHEET: OWNERS

## DONKEY CARE

### ACTIVITY CALENDAR

Throughout the year there are a number of important activities you must carry-out to maintain the health and welfare of your donkey. This calendar gives guidance to help you keep track of these vital tasks.



All donkeys require the same basic level of care, but their individual needs may vary depending on their health and age.

### Daily

- Twice a day, watch your donkey closely to make sure it is displaying normal behaviour and not showing signs of injury or illness.
  - Twice a day, check the amount your donkey is eating and drinking. Also check the consistency and frequency of any droppings.
  - Remove rugs and check your donkey for rubs or sores.
  - Groom your donkey if its coat is dry and pick out its feet.
  - Apply insect repellent according to the time of year.
  - Give enough high-fibre, low-energy food (such as barley straw) to satisfy your donkey's natural appetite and maintain a healthy body condition.
  - Extra feed may be required depending on your donkey's individual needs or the time of year.
  - Organise daily exercise to keep your donkey fit and healthy. Provide ridden, driven or walking exercise if turnout is not available.
  - Make sure clean, fresh water is easily available. Check buckets and troughs are clean and working properly.
  - Muck-out stables and remove droppings from fields and yards.
  - Give your donkey toys or non-poisonous bark-covered logs for extra mental stimulation.
- See Factsheet: Environmental Enrichment for more information.*

*See Factsheet series: Feeding Donkeys for more information.*

- If the weather is suitable, turn your donkey out in a paddock to graze. Consider your donkey's health and stage of life before turning out to graze; it may not be appropriate to allow grazing. It is also important to check the availability of shelter, before they are allowed to graze.

*See Factsheet: Keeping Donkeys on Small Pastures for more information.*



## Weekly

- Check all perimeter fences for damage. Make sure fencing is well-maintained and secure.
- Check for poisonous plants. Correctly remove and destroy any that you find.

*See Factsheet: Poisonous Plants and Trees for more information.*

- Disinfect stable floors and remove excess dust from stables and shelters.

## Monthly



**Record observations in a monthly diary or on a quality of life record sheet. Noting down health measurements (such as temperature and respiratory rate) and behaviour will help you to understand what is normal for your donkey. By doing this, you can quickly spot potential health problems or changes that need investigating.**

**See: *Quality of Life Assessment pack* for more information.**

**Available at [thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/shop/categories/donkey-owner-care-pack](https://thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/shop/categories/donkey-owner-care-pack)**

- Arrange farrier visits every 6-10 weeks.
- Record your donkey's body condition score and heart girth measurement. Use these with the weight estimator tool, or a donkey-specific weigh tape, to monitor weight gain or loss.

*See Factsheets: How to Carry Out Body Condition Scoring, Donkey Body Condition Score Chart and Donkey Weight Estimator for further information.*

- Take your donkey's temperature and respiratory rate.



## Yearly



**Put reminders on your calendar so you can keep track of what is needed and when.**

- Carry out a faecal worm egg count test at least twice yearly to check for worms. The results of this test will help you decide whether you need to give a chemical worming treatment. You should administer wormers as advised by your vet or by a person qualified to give advice.

*See Factsheet: Responsible worm control for more information.*

- Arrange a visit from a vet or a qualified equine dental technician to check your donkey's teeth. Depending on the condition of your donkey's teeth, you may be told to arrange more frequent dental checks.
- Organise a vet check and arrange for your donkey to have any appropriate vaccination boosters.
- Check that your donkey's stable is in good condition. Make sure the water supply and electrics are in safe working order.

## **ADDITIONAL SEASONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Spring**

- Carefully and slowly introduce your donkey to spring grazing.
- If necessary, limit your donkey's grass intake using track systems and enrichment planting. Monitor grass growth daily.

*See Factsheet: Keeping Donkeys on Small Pastures for more information.*

- Groom thoroughly to help your donkey shed its winter coat.
- If necessary, begin applying fly repellent. It can sometimes take donkeys a while to get used to this. Try applying the repellent with a grooming brush if your donkey objects to a spray.
- Consider removing your muck heap to minimise flies during spring and summer.



### **Summer**

- Closely monitor your donkey's weight and adjust grazing if necessary.
- Continue with daily fly repellent applications. Fit fly rugs and masks if required.
- Prevent sunburn by applying animal-safe sun lotion to pink-skinned areas, such as your donkey's nose.
- Order hay or haylage if it is required during the colder months. Prices are often lower at this time of year. Remember, freshly cut hay or haylage should not be fed straight away.
- Arrange for winter rugs to be cleaned and repaired if necessary.





## **ADDITIONAL SEASONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Autumn**

- Prepare field gateways for winter. Lay material that will help prevent a build-up of mud, such as sand or gravel.
- Monitor any flush of autumn grass and adjust grazing accordingly.
- Fence-off oak trees to prevent your donkey eating poisonous acorns. Make sure your donkey does not have access to sycamore trees. Ingestion of sycamore seeds can cause a serious disease called 'atypical myopathy'.

*See Factsheet: Poisonous Plants and Trees for more information.*

- Treat fencing, stables and shelters with animal-safe wood preservative.
- Stock-up on grit or salt for spreading on icy areas.

### **Winter**

- Closely monitor your donkey's weight and increase straw feed. Start to provide hay or haylage, along with supplementary feed, if needed.

*See Factsheet: Feeding Donkeys for more information.*

- Monitor your donkey's water intake. Donkeys often dislike drinking very cold water, so you may need to add warm water to be sure your donkey drinks enough.
- Prevent water pipes from freezing by adding insulation.
- Make sure your donkey has access to hardstanding, such as concrete. This will help to minimise foot problems and mud fever.
- Grit yards during icy weather.

