



The National Miniature Donkey Association

Advice For The New Miniature Donkey Owner

Are you considering Miniature Donkeys? Or have you just purchased your first pair? There are a number of things you need to know to be sure you and your new equine will get off to a good start.

The first thing you will need is adequate housing and a place for them to be turned out for exercise. The housing should provide protection from rain, snow or sun and be free of drafts. Heat is not necessary, but a tight building is important, especially for those who live in cold climates. A small barn or outbuilding will do nicely depending on the part of the country you live in. In cold climates you might want something more substantial. The flooring should be appropriate to drain or absorb urine and be easy to clean or "muck out". Stall mats or bedding (straw or sawdust) work well although straw is a better choice for the foaling stall. The Donkeys will need access to fresh, clean water year round (an automatic waterer or a tank heater in cold climates is a real time saver). You will also need a hayrack, mineral and plain salt blocks and a feed tub. Check the stall and paddock area carefully to make sure there are no sharp edges or places an animal can get caught or injured. Ideally you should have a stall or barn with access to a paddock or pasture which will allow your Donkeys to come and go if the weather turns bad and you are not available. This is the best situation for the Donkeys and the least labor intensive for you.

If you have purchased your Donkeys from an experienced, reputable breeder no doubt they have given you information to get you started. You have probably gathered that a Donkey, as a herd animal, needs a companion and the best companion is another Donkey. Even if you purchased your Miniature Donkey as a companion to a horse, what happens when the horse goes off to be ridden? Usually the horse doesn't want to leave his Donkey friend and the Donkey is very unhappy to have his companion go without him so a pair of Donkeys makes good sense. A single Miniature Donkey will be lonely without a companion often braying and pacing when alone. Sheep and/or goats are not appropriate companions for a single Donkey since one-on-one Donkey/small livestock play could turn rough. The equation may change if you have two Miniature Donkeys coexisting with smaller livestock. Gradual introductions will let everyone get to know one another and ease transition times.

You will also need to properly introduce dogs as well as other family pets when you bring your new Donkeys home. Donkeys tend to have a natural suspicion of dogs (as predators), but with time will get to know family members. Be sure your dogs are not chasing after the Donkeys.

A Miniature Donkey will not make an appropriate "guard donkey". It is generally believed that since donkeys are not particularly fond of dogs, that they are naturally good guard animals for sheep & goat herds. The truth is that a Miniature Donkey is no match for more than one dog at a time and sadly there have been too many reports of Miniature Donkeys

being mauled and killed by neighborhood dogs. Standard size donkeys may be able to fill the role as a guardian donkey, but not Miniature Donkeys. Therefore your fences should be safe for the donkeys, which means keeping predators out — either woven wire (field fencing) or high tensile fencing with "hot" wires as a deterrent.

Beware of foals for sale that are too young for weaning as this can affect how well adjusted they will be as adults. The little ones need to stay with their moms for approximately five to six months, but no younger than four months. You might want to ask the person you're buying from if they would keep the foal & jennet together if the foal is too young for a little longer. Even though you are eager to get your new pet home it is in the donkey's best interest and yours. Young foals will learn many valuable lessons by remaining with adult Donkeys until weaning.

Every intact Miniature Donkey jack that isn't being used for breeding should be gelded (see the Gelding Incentive Program for more information). You and your family will be happier with him as a wonderful, loving pet and his life will be much less complicated without having to deal with hormones. Many ungelded jacks face an uncertain future of being passed from home to home or ending up in an auction due to their instinctive, unbridled passions at times. Please consider gelding your jacks this is extremely important. However, before making an appointment with your veterinarian to do this surgery, ask NMDA to send you detailed information for your vet on how to geld a Miniature Donkey — the procedure should be done a bit differently than a horse to prevent excessive bleeding.

What else do you need for your Donkey now that you have housing, a turnout and a companion? A Donkey, like a horse, will need a basic series of vaccinations and yearly boosters. Your local equine veterinarian can tell you what vaccines are appropriate in your area. Tetanus, Eastern/Western Sleeping Sickness, Rhinopneumonitis, Influenza, Rabies and West Nile are among vaccines that are often recommended. Your Donkey will need regular parasite control with a worming paste given every four to eight weeks, depending on the age of the animal. Again, check with your veterinarian to set up a schedule that applies to your particular part of the country. Hooves will need to be trimmed approximately every two to three months. Be sure your farrier (a person trained to trim hooves) is familiar with trimming a Donkey because Donkey hooves are trimmed at a more upright angle than a horse.

Nutrition is another subject where there are many differences of opinion and feeding practices in different parts of the country. Miniature Donkeys need good quality, dust-free hay. A timothy grass mix is very popular in the northeast, for instance. Mold in feed has been known to cause health problems and birth defects so good quality feed is essential, i.e. good grass hay should have a nice green color and a sweet smell (something like tea). Pregnant or nursing jennets and foals usually need a horse grain in addition to hay — in general a 10% to 12% protein content is all that is necessary and only a small amount (1 cup a.m. & p.m.). Donkeys are easy keepers and can get fat very easily so be very careful you do not overfeed your Donkey. Grazing on rich pasture day in and day out may be too much of a good thing too. Learn how to monitor your Donkey's body condition to be sure they are a healthy weight. Some areas of the country are deficient in selenium so many breeders supplement with a little selenium and Vitamin E. Consult with your veterinarian concerning supplements.

A few safety tips to remember:

- Make arrangements to have a veterinarian you can call on whenever needed — ask if they can provide emergency care. Invite them over soon after you bring your Miniature Donkeys home . . . this way the vet will see how your Donkeys look and act when they are feeling well and the visit will also allow the vet to learn how to get to your farm quickly if needed. There really is nothing like a good preliminary visit with your veterinarian — whether on your farm or in his office — to put your mind at ease about the healthy future of your Miniature Donkeys.
- Never leave a halter on your Donkeys due to the danger of hanging.
- Check your pasture for any toxic plants (your Cooperative Extension Service is a great source for identifying these troublemakers).
- Start working with your Donkeys on basic halter training.
- Learn how to take your Donkey's temperature.
- Be aware of any changes in your animal's behavior, eating, drinking or manure.

There are many good references that can help you learn more about your Donkey. The American Donkey and Mule Society (ADMS) have some wonderful resources in their Book Service at www.lovelongears.com.

It's true there are responsibilities in caring for Miniature Donkeys, but you will find them to be wonderful companions and great family members. May you have many years in the delightful company of these magical critters.

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