

ENVIRONMENT ENRICHMENT



THE DONKEY SANCTUARY'S GUIDE TO ENRICHING THE LIVES OF DONKEYS AND MULES



“Are my donkeys happy?” - a question that most donkey carers ask themselves from time to time. Often, donkeys are well fed and physically want for very little, but once their basic needs have been met is there anything more that can be done to help donkeys and mules enjoy their lives with us?

 **Find out more
inside**

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENT ENRICHMENT?



Environment enrichment is a process for creating greater variety and choice in an animal's environment, this can be through changes to structures or to husbandry practices.

Domesticated environments often provide limited opportunities for animals to perform natural and normal behaviours such as feeding or exercise to the levels that are required to meet the animal's innate needs. Enrichment helps to ensure the animal's mental and physical needs are more fully met through increasing amounts of mental and physical stimulation.



[Learn more about categories of enrichment](#)

There are two approaches to environmental enrichment

We can try to create a more natural or “wild” environment for the animal or we can provide toys and activities that animals can operate to provide stimulation. Using both approaches increases the enrichment provided for the animal. In this document we will provide ideas for both types of enrichment.

WHAT DO DONKEYS DO IN THE WILD?

Donkeys in a natural environment walk up to 12 miles (20 km) a day in search of rough, coarse vegetation on which they can browse, by comparison, the domesticated donkey will often be kept in a small grass paddock and with the addition of straw, hay or haylage. The high energy diet of the domesticated donkey means that their nutritional requirements can be met within 2-3 hours of foraging, they can gain all their nutritional requirements by walking less than one mile a day. In a wild situation, donkeys will interact very much with a rich and varied environment that includes watering holes, high and low ground, open spaces, possibly wooded areas as well as dealing with other species.



**Learn more about
donkeys in the wild**



**Discover the 5 goals for
enrichment.**

WHAT'S THE BENEFIT OF ENRICHMENT?

ENRICHMENT IS NOW RECOGNISED AS ESSENTIAL TO AN ANIMAL'S WELLBEING

Enrichment for domesticated animals, especially those in zoos and conservation parks throughout the world, is commonly practised as a way of maintaining the wellbeing of their animals.

Mental stimulation helps to;

- Maintain normal behaviour
- Prevent problems associated with boredom
- Ensure that the instinctual needs are met
- Cope with the challenges of domestication
- Increase exercise
- Maintain healthy weight

Before beginning an enrichment program it is vital to assess the individual needs of your animals and identify where their needs are not being met.





BEFORE STARTING AN ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

To ensure you are meeting your animals' greatest needs please complete the two important exercises below

Resource Mapping

Use this exercise as a starting point to explore what your donkeys' environment currently provides for them and begin to plan how you can further meet their needs



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Time Budgets

In this exercise we examine how your donkeys spend their entire day. This allows us to understand where our donkey might get bored, and from there, work on ways to help.



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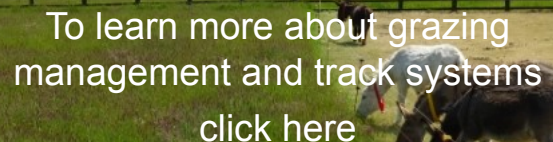
The mutual benefits of environment enrichment

Donkeys and mules only rest lying down for about four hours a day, this leaves around 20hours a day to fill with activity.

Just like animals we often suffer from boredom, whether as a young child we are bored by long summer holidays, visiting relatives or tormented by a long drive, or as adults undertaking long boring tasks, stuck at a desk when we would rather be outside.

One of the keys to improving the welfare of our donkeys is to meet their natural needs. Needs such as social interaction with other donkeys or other species, and the ability to move and travel over distances, which in the wild would be between 16 and 20 kilometres a day. Interaction with novel objects and situations is something that the donkey, in its natural environment, encounters on a daily basis. It is also natural for our donkeys to want to graze for long periods of time. In our beautiful lush green pastures long periods of grazing would be detrimental, so we have to find other ways to meet to these needs. Part of grazing is also the search for variety and quality of different plants and food sources.

These natural behaviours form the key to enriching our animals' environment. We can create a track grazing system which controls the amount of available grass but offers greater distances for the animal to walk.



To learn more about grazing
management and track systems
[click here](#)

We can introduce non-poisonous bark covered logs or even branches with fresh leaves for them to pick at. Toys can be one of a donkey's favourite activities, from a wellington boot to rubber feed bucket, an old football or simply a plastic traffic cone.

Consider simply piling straw and hay into one spot and mix the two together thoroughly so the donkey has to pick through their rations to find the best bits then put those piles of straw and hay in different places in the animal's environment so it might have to move between piles of food. In certain circumstances consider the use of haynets with small holes which if used safely, might increase the grazing time of animals on restricted diets.

Extra handling, you could just be grooming or picking out feet, training to go over and through obstacles which in the end result in a safe calm animal who can be taken for walks along country lanes or to the local village shops. Interaction with friends, relatives, neighbours all produce fantastic environment enrichment.

The key here to all of these aspects is change. Change produces mental stimulation by creating new environments, new situations and new experiences.

The title of this article is 'Mutual Benefits of Environment Enrichment' and there are some benefits to our mind, body and spirit that we humans gain from enriching our donkeys environment. The use of our imagination to create enrichment stretches our minds and on a 'use it or lose it' basis, this has got to be a good thing. On a spiritual level there is a great deal of enjoyment and positive wellbeing that we will get from enriching our donkey's environment as well as the comfort we feel from seeing them happier and healthier.

Finally, of course all of these things take a little bit of physical exercise, to move things, produce things, create things, change things, and that physical exercise has to be good for us too. So you see, enriching our donkey's environment also enriches our own.

Enrichment doesn't mean your donkey or mule runs around all day trying to do all the things that you have set up for them. Good enrichment is a mixture of changing the way we carry out some routine activities such as feeding and creating an environment that more fully meets our donkeys needs. We don't have to try everything all at once...



Try the 'do one thing' approach

Just think of one thing each day that you can do differently in your animal's environment and change it. From there develop a seven or fourteen day programme and just write down the things that you want to change, move, create and rotate them on a seven to fourteen day basis so there is always something new or novel being introduced to the donkey's environment.

Explore the following pages for ideas on enrichment

MOVE

Move things around, put food in different places, offer access to different water sources, and change parts of the environment the animal can gain access to; move location of feed sources, move logs and other toys on a daily or weekly basis. Move the donkey to different areas for grooming and training.

RENEW

Renew the toys, familiar toys become boring, so change toys and introduce novel objects, in and out of the animals' environment on a regular basis. Renew logs when the bark is stripped.

REFRESH

Refresh those logs, change them as soon as the donkeys have eaten the bark and lose interest, refresh branches, salt licks, buckets, toys etc, simply by cleaning them.

INVENT

Invent new ways of presenting enrichment ideas; put a couple of pieces of carrot at the bottom of a wellington boot, put small hazel branches at different heights and in novel locations.

NATURAL

Try to keep things natural, think of what the donkey naturally needs. If you can meet their natural needs they remain happier and healthier.



Environment

The Key to good enrichment

While a flat paddock with post and rail fencing is safe and visually very appealing to us humans, it may be a less than stimulating environment for a donkey or mule. The creation of a more varied and interesting living area is vital for overall enrichment success, this is something we can all do for our donkeys by starting to...

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Exercise and Work

The more we can do with the donkey in terms of training and exercise, the more mental stimulation the donkey will receive. This can be achieved by ...

 **More ideas**

Human Interaction

One of the most important ways of providing mental stimulation for a donkey is to interact with them on a daily basis, this can be grooming and general affection or...

 **Even More**

Food and Food Availability

The general rule with food would be to slow the rate at which donkeys can consume their normal rations and to increase the range of foods available. Try this...

 **Loads more**

Toys

The provision of "toys" can enhance the mental stimulation available in a donkey's environment. All toys should be carefully considered for...

 **Lots more**



Ideas for enrichment

Here are some important safety tips

1. Ensure any enrichment items are strong enough and won't break
2. Slice carrots/fruit/vegetables lengthways to reduce choking risks
3. Make sure your donkey can't get caught or hung up
4. Ensure there is enough to go around to avoid conflict between donkeys
5. Avoid anything sharp that could cause injury, when played with by donkeys
6. Make sure all food is suitable and non toxic to your donkeys and mules

Explore some of the following ideas for your donkeys, but consider the suitability for your animals and environment, adapt and amend to suit your situation but always think about safety, avoiding conflict and frustration between individuals!

Activity: Bark Logs

Donkeys and mules are naturally browsers as well as grazers. Safe branches, twigs and logs will provide enrichment for donkeys and increase the variety of their diet.

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Activity: Flavoured Water

Providing a novel flavour to drinking water can create greater interest and variety to the donkeys normal water source, especially on hot days, or it can be gently warmed in the winter

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Activity: Herb/Spice Spread

Donkeys have a great sense of smell so providing interesting and novel smells for them to explore is an easy way to enrich their environment

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Activity: Training

It is easy to overlong training as a form of enrichment, but learning something new or overcoming problems can really keep them busy

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Activity: Apple and carrot skewers

Encourage your donkeys to think more about how to get to the food.

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Activity: Hide the forage

This requires the donkeys to use their excellent sense of smell and natural inquisitiveness.

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Activity: Box of Treats

This one is like a donkey's birthday present, so let the donkeys figure it out.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Banana Trails

Mental stimulation, increasing investigation, novel smells and tastes, increased exercise.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Hunt the Treats

Investigation, mental stimulation and problem solving. Everyone has time for this one occasionally.

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Activity: Forage box

You will need some carpentry skills for this one, but once done it provides a lot of enrichment chances.

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Activity: Hole Feeders

Get some logs and a drill, get creative and drill some holes.

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Activity: Treat parcels

A very simple activity that requires very little resources or time.

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Activity: Hanging Basket Ball

Encourage browsing and stretching on a different level with this activity.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Kerrplunk

An adaption of a childhood game encourages browsing, stretching and team work.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Change of Scene

It is easy to get stuck in a rut, try ringing some changes to your routine.

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Activity: A Prickly Dilemma

This common plant is high in vitamin C but has to be eaten carefully and slowly.

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[Click here to learn more about safe trees and shrubs](#)

Activity: Which Way Now?

Get your donkeys to think more about where they are going and how to get there.

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Activity: An Oldie but a Goodie

Apart from pasties what else would you use this common veg for?

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Not from the Hand

We know you like to give treats, but this way they are enriching as well.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Add Just a Hint of flavour

A longer term exercise to increase variety and foraging.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Donkey Agility

This exercise is enriching but it builds confidence too!

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Donkey walking

Create the opportunity to see new sights, encounter new scents, and give them a change of scenery.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Quality Time

A simple exercise for a busy world and has benefits for the human too.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Toys

Can a young donkey ever have enough toys? Variety is the spice of life

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

[Click here to visit the Care and Welfare pages](#)

Activity: Weed forage nets

A great way to provide variety and do some weeding at the same time.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Stable Mirror

Mirror mirror on the wall who is the fairest of us all?

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Pamper session at the salon

Slow down, take your time and go to town with the pampering.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Activity: Tug-o-war

This one is often a young donkey's favourite game, for carrying, pulling, flinging and banging you can't beat a good toy.

[PDF](#)[VIEW](#)

Help us to Help More Donkeys and Mules

Send us your enrichment ideas, experiences and stories

We really want to keep growing the number and range of ideas that we can share with donkey owners and carers around the world so if you have different ideas and experiences of enrichment then please share them with us so we can continue to update and expand a database of enrichment ideas for others to use.

Simply download the document below fill in the enrichment ideas, include your name, country and donkey or mules names if you want us to credit you with the exercise, and send it to the email address included on the sheet.

Thank you for your help



Get enrichment recording sheet

Please tell us what you think

We want to know if you have learnt from this online learning about enrichment, please click one of the buttons below to tell us how you feel about this learning experience.



Please could you take 60 seconds to answer six brief questions to share with us how this online learning has affected your donkeys or mules, because it will help us learn about our work - Thank you, click or tap this box to take the survey

Learn More about Donkey Care

The Donkey Sanctuary website has a huge amount of information on donkey care and welfare. You will find factsheets on all aspects of donkey care, feeding, behaviour, disease, and management. For detailed information about donkeys and their care and management there are links to the Donkey Care Handbook, which can be downloaded anywhere in the world. You will also find information about donkey care and behaviour training courses in the UK, and links to projects and centres in the rest of the world

For more information on everything donkey, simply visit our website



thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk



Every penny helps, so if you have enjoyed this document please help by following this link to donate and help us continue our work worldwide. Thank you for your support.



HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

With Grateful Thanks

Firstly to the willing donkeys and mules who have vigorously tested the exercises and ideas contained in this document without complaint.

Thank you to all the staff at the Donkey Sanctuary who have contributed to the creation of this online learning. With the contribution of ideas, pictures from Newton Farm, New Arrivals, Town Barton, Woods and DAT Centres as well as staff members Sophie Carter and Sarah Long for providing video clips which have been invaluable, this document would not have been possible without you all.

Thank you to our farms staff who are developing and testing a range of enrichment for larger groups of donkeys for use in sanctuaries and charities worldwide.

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