

KEEPING DONKEYS ON SMALL PASTURES – A QUICK GUIDE



**THE DONKEY
SANCTUARY**

INTRODUCTION

Donkeys are social creatures who thrive when kept in small companionable groups, these may be small family groups or bonded pairs. Grouping them together allows them to express natural behaviours with each other such as playing or mutual grooming. As a donkey owner or keeper you may be wondering how best to manage your available land, or you may be in the position of designing your own field layout. Below you will find some ideas which will enable you to make the most of your facilities, keeping your donkeys healthy and happy whilst maintaining your grass. Resting grassland for a period of time is beneficial to the health of your donkeys as it can help to break the lifecycle of some parasites potentially reducing the worm burden.

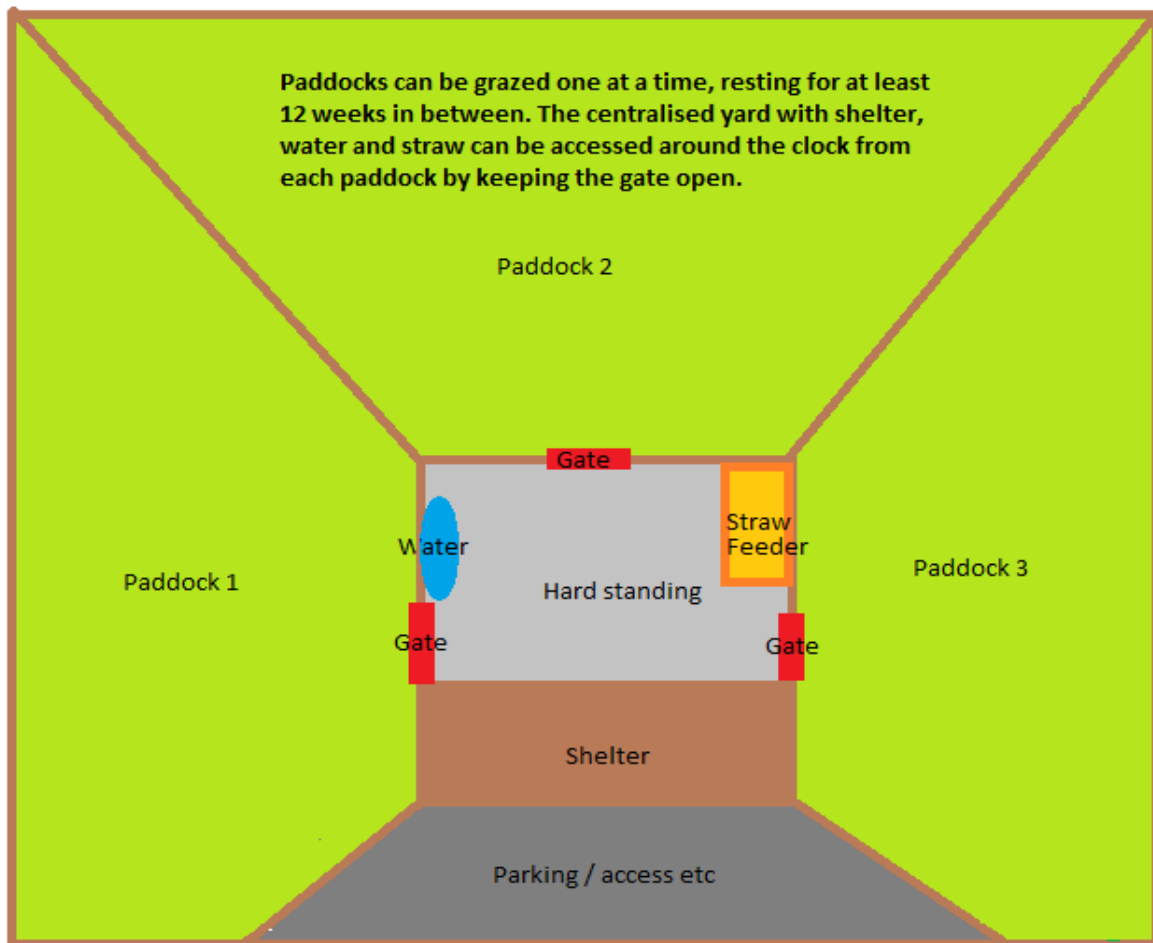


LAND AND REQUIREMENTS

A minimum of 0.5 acres should be allocated per donkey (although it is rarely necessary to graze the whole area at once). Divide available land into 3 or more paddocks e.g. 4 donkeys should have a total area of 2 acres, divided into 3 small paddocks of approximately 0.6 acres. Group animals together and graze one paddock at a time.

Donkeys require access to shelter, water and straw at all times (even when at grass).

Donkeys' hooves can rot quickly if they are continually exposed to sodden ground, therefore it is crucial to provide a dry/draind area for times of wet weather. This could be an area of concrete hard standing, a sand school (or other surfaced school with good drainage), or a woodchip area etc. It is possible to lay temporary hardstanding using materials such as rubber mats or paving slabs.



A sample layout of how to divide up pasture whilst maintaining access to all major features. Taking into consideration the area/type of grazing/number of donkeys it may be necessary to strip graze.

FENCING

Fencing will need to be suitable for donkeys but may need to be flexible to give access to water, hard standing and shelter (see the Donkey Care Handbook for more details on fencing). Moveable electric fencing allows you to configure the set up as required whilst keeping costs down, and is more flexible if changes need to be made to the set up in the future.

Donkeys will quickly learn to escape if the fence is not switched on whenever they are in the field. Escaping donkeys can easily become wrapped up in fencing. Always use electric fencing according to the manufacturer's instructions. Take care when introducing new animals and remove or fence off any objects with the potential to cause injury.



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PASTURE MANAGEMENT AND ROTATION

Graze each paddock until the grass is virtually down to the ground before moving onto the next paddock. Depending on the size of each paddock and the number of donkeys you may still need to strip graze (see Donkey Care Handbook for guidance). Poo pick the paddock in use at least twice a week to avoid rank spots developing and to help break the lifecycle of some parasitic worms.

Harrowing after moving animals may be an option for improving pasture parasite contamination. Harrowing spreads manure and the eggs contained within it exposing them to environmental conditions. Extremely hot and dry weather will destroy eggs by desiccation. However, unless the weather is very hot and dry harrowing will be of no benefit.

Each paddock should be rested for at least 12 weeks to help break the lifecycle of the most common intestinal parasites and reduce their presence on pasture (although there are some parasites that will endure for much longer lengths of time). Do not be tempted to bring resting paddocks into use even in exceptional circumstances as you will undo all the good work done so far.

Tall weeds such as nettles, docks and thistles may be grazed by your donkeys, however they may spread and cause rank areas in the paddock, in which case they are best topped or strimmed. Remove any chopped weeds from the paddock.

Check regularly for ragwort or other poisonous plants, anything you cannot identify should be considered a potentially poisonous plant and further advice sought (see poisonous plants factsheets for more info). Re-seed any poached areas in the spring or autumn with a non-rye grass seed mixture. Allow re-seeded areas to establish before introducing donkeys again.

For more details on keeping donkeys at grass download your copy of the Donkey Care Handbook available from The Donkey Sanctuary website.

Providing an area of wood chip or hard standing can help to prevent donkeys' hooves from rotting in wet weather.



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The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969.

The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588), both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU.

Incorporating: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST); The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT).

WORKING WORLDWIDE