



# EQUINES

Horses evolved from small grazing animals. They were often predated on the open steppe, and have developed the ability to walk and run on their fingers, which added length and speed to their legs. Humans have hunted them, but with the invention of agriculture they have been domesticated and bred up to help with different jobs and tasks that people find difficult.

## Working Equines

Horses are famous for their running abilities. People have used them for transport for this reason. Until the development of the fossil fuel engine, they were the main practical solution for transportation on land.

Because of their size, horses have a fair bit of leg muscle. People have found that they can be used to pull ploughs and other heavy traction jobs. Horses have been bred for this purpose, with draught horse breeds are much stronger and sturdier than the standard or racing types.

## Breeding Equines

Most modern horse breeding is about horse racing. Stud farms are common in Ireland and around the world. Racing horses are descended from breeds bred for speed and battle awareness and many have the genes of Fergana and Arabian horses.



Many people in Ireland still keep horses. In most other developed states only people with access to resources keep horses. In Ireland many people still maintain the tradition of the amateur equestrian, in rural and urban environments. It is good to keep tradition alive and as the economy is currently based on the consumption of fossil fuels it is great that an alternative method is still known and practised.

**Modern horse breeds (click [here](#) for more information) are varied, from the huge Shire Horses standing 19 hands high, down to Shetland Ponies at just 11 hands.**

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*A hand is the measurement still used in many countries for measuring the height of a horse, although other countries use centimetres. A hand is 4 inches or 10 centimetres. It was standardised as a measurement in England in 1541, by Henry VIII.*

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### Donkeys

It is a common mistake to assume that donkeys are just like small horses. Although they both belong to the genus *Equus*, there are many differences between the two.

One of the main differences, which is relevant to today's donkeys in Ireland, is that they have no waterproofing in their coats. Horses, on the other hand, do. Donkeys need to have adequate shelter from the rain. A second difference is that as a desert animal, they also find the bogs and wet fields of Ireland a challenge, both for their feet and for their digestion.

Donkeys and horses can breed together, the result being called a mule (male donkey, female horse) or a hinny (male horse, female donkey). On a genetic level, these offspring have 63 chromosomes. Pure bred horses have 64 chromosomes, pure bred donkeys have 62. Because of their parents' incompatible genes, the resulting mule will usually be sterile while a hinny will only occasionally will be capable of breeding.



*A male donkey is called a stallion, sometimes known as a jack.  
Castrated stallions (gelded) are known as geldings.  
A female donkey is a jenny.*

### Related Videos & Websites

- ⇒ [Working horses on organic farms](#) ⇐
- ⇒ [Shoeing a Draft Horse](#) ⇐
- ⇒ [Ten Characteristics of a Horse](#) ⇐
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