

The container method is easier once the foal has taken to it; the foal is sucking up from a container which is easier to clean than a bottle.

For either method and to begin with, the foal should be comfortably restricted against a wall or hay bales with another person standing behind to keep it still. Place your left hand over the top of its muzzle and place your fingers in the mouth so that the bowl is at lip level, or your right hand holds the bottle so that the teat is in the foal's mouth. Hopefully the foal will get the taste and begin sucking. If it refuses all attempts you can resort to using a syringe. Your vet should have these available. Just squirt a little in the foal's mouth until it gets the taste and begins to suck. You can then try the other methods again. If the foal still refuses, a teaspoon of honey or even molasses added to the warm milk might help get it started as donkey milk is sweeter than horse milk.

For the first two days after birth you will need to feed every four hours 24/7 at about 150 mls per feed for a strong foal. A weak foal will need hourly feeding and it may not take even that small amount.

Gradually increase the amount as the foal will take the milk. Some foals will only drink a little and need frequent feeding, but your foal should be drinking 600 mls per feed within a week although the size of the foal will also determine how much it is able to take in.

Providing your foal is doing well, is lively and enthusiastic, increase the amount gradually until it is drinking up to 1 ltr at each feed. Some foals will not ever drink this amount and 600 mls might be the limit. If it appears to be hungry give more, but watch its bowels to make sure it is not scouring. If this happens consult your vet immediately as a foal with a gastric upset can go downhill very suddenly.

The Older Foal:

Sometimes a jenny dies when a foal is several weeks or even months old. It can be very hard work encouraging a foal who is grieving for its mother to accept a milk substitute and a supplement may be the only way to

move forward. We highly recommend ***Dunstan Orphan Foal supplement*** which can be introduced after three weeks of age. This is a very easily digested mix designed for foals up to the age of five months.

Other foods:

Your foal will need to have good herbage and hay available. (See the pamphlet *How to feed your Donkey*) Donkey foals will copy what another donkey eats so you will need to have a 'friend' for your foal. This may be another young donkey or an older maternal jenny or even a pony, who will also teach it that it is a donkey and not a human and to eat other foods. The other donkey can be offered good quality hay to start the foal off. Even a calf could help. The main thing is that the foal has a companion or friend.

Behaviour:

Hand reared foals especially ungelded colts, can become over confident with their carer and be very naughty, biting and kicking out. They need another donkey or donkeys from which to learn manners. You may be able to have it gelded if its testicles are accessible so that its hormones quieten down. Your vet or a knowledgeable friend will be able to tell you upon examination.

Weaning:

The time to wean will vary according to your grazing, climate and how well the foal is growing, but your foal should be well covered with muscle and have a bit of spare fat. Its coat will look clean, bright and healthy. Of course the youngster, like all donkeys, will require a shelter in the form of a waterproof shed or to be covered with a warm waterproof cover during wet weather. Donkeys, being desert animals, lack the oils its cousin the horse secretes from its skin and there is nothing more miserable than a rain soaked donkey.

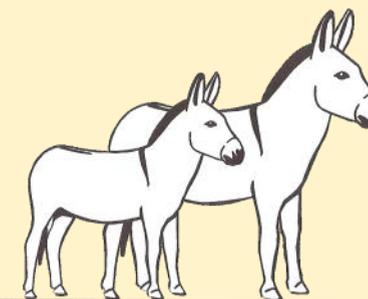
Make sure you have your foal registered with the Donkey & Mule Society of NZ. (Inc.) Microchipping or branding will also mean that it is able to be identified at any time throughout its life so a true record of its age, breeding and history will not be lost.



This foal was hand reared from birth and was learning to drink from a bowl (with the owner's fingers in its mouth) at the time of the photo.

The Orphan Donkey Foal

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Donkey and Mule Protection Trust NZ

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The Orphan Donkey Foal

There is no more enchanting a creature than a healthy donkey foal frisking with a companion foal. Those adorable ears, large eyes and beautiful plush coat are irresistible. However, occasionally trouble strikes and being prepared may mean the difference between a dead foal and a happy outcome.

Before your jenny foals, you would be wise to check where you can obtain colostrum from a donkey or mare should you need it. Ask your vet if mare's colostrum is kept on site or ask at a stud farm, as many will have fresh or frozen colostrum available. It is absolutely necessary that your foal obtain colostrum from an equine and not a cow, sheep, goat or some other animal. If you are inexperienced, also ask if a vet would be available to assist at the birth if needed.

Apart from the sad event when a jenny dies during birth, sometimes a jenny will refuse to feed her foal and it has even been known that a new mother, perhaps frightened by the experience of giving birth, attacks her foal. Also a jenny may die for many reasons leaving a foal too young to wean.

Ideally your foal could be fostered onto a lactating jenny/mare, but if there is not one available you will have to hand rear.

The Newborn Orphan Foal:

If it happens that the mother has to be put down or dies soon after giving birth the foal must receive at least a litre of colostrum (in several feeds) as soon as possible, certainly within the first eight hours of birth. Colostrum is the rich first milk a jenny makes as her foaling time approaches and it contains antibodies and many nutrients your foal needs so it is absolutely essential to your foal. You may be able to milk the jenny (up to four hours after death) and that would protect the foal with local antibodies for immunity. If you can only obtain frozen colostrum, you must thaw it in water heated to 38°C. and of course feed it at that temperature, not cold.

The vet must be called as a Tetanus anti-toxin will need to be administered unless the jenny has been vaccinated within the last four weeks of pregnancy. Your vet may also see a need to administer vitamins and minerals, especially if the foal is weak.

The foal must be kept warm and dry. As a newborn foal's mother is not there to lick and stimulate her foal or encourage it, you will need to spend time rubbing it dry with a warm towel.

If the foal is weak it will need feeding every hour at first until it is strong enough to stand and walk and able to drink a good amount.

The quantity will depend on the size of the foal and how often it will feed.

Talk to it and gently stroke/rub it, often. All sentient beings value their lives and want to be happy and your donkey foal especially so. Spend time with it so that it does not feel alone in the world.

Be sure to check that its bowels are moving. If the meconium (first dropping) is retained you will notice the foal straining with an arched back and there will be no sign of faeces. You will need to call your vet as it is best left to an expert to remove any blockages. Check also that the foal is passing plenty of urine.

Foster Mother, Bottle or Bucket feeding?

After the colostrum has been given, the ideal is to find a jenny or mare; a gentle maternal soul who has either lost her own foal or has enough milk to feed two foals would be ideal. You have to be very careful when you introduce the foal and one way is to have the foal in a small adjacent area where they can see one another. Milk the jenny/mare and feed 250 mls to the foal and make a big fuss of both encouraging them to interact through the barrier between them. That may be a low fence or bales of hay, but be very careful in case the potential foster mother becomes aggressive. Milk the jenny/mare and when she can smell her own scent on the foal she might accept the foal drinking from her. She will also provide the cheapest milk for you.

If that is not possible or fails you will have to feed the foal with a supplement suited to equines.

Fortunately for us today there are scientifically formulated **milk supplements** available such as **Vetpro Foalmilk powder** and they have an informative page *Raising the Orphan Foal* on their website which we advise you to read. <http://www.vetpro.co.nz/Articles/Raising+the+Orphan+Foal.html>

Dunstan Orphan Foal supplement can be introduced after three weeks of age and **Dunstan Weanling Mix** can be introduced at five months. These are excellent products suited to donkey foals.

There are pros and cons of feeding from a bottle or container.

Orphan foals require dedication. Each will be different; some will drink from a bottle and teat, others from a bowl but, you will need to try and see what works for you and your foal. All utensils must be kept scrupulously clean otherwise pathogens will cause gut infections which are serious. Fresh water in a clean utensil must be provided after the first few days.



This foal lost its mother when it was four weeks old. Max refused all offers of a substitute milk formula at first as he was grieving for his mother and it took days using a syringe before his owner managed to get him onto a bottle and then drinking from a bowl.

A bottle with a soft teat allows the milk to be taken more slowly and therefore saliva is well mixed with the milk aiding digestion. On the down side, as the foal's neck is reaching up it can happen that milk goes down into the lungs and the foal chokes. Even foals on their mothers can choke. *Continued overleaf*