

Herbivores

Discussion Questions:



- 1) What are herbivores?**
- 2) Which mammals are herbivorous?**
- 3) What features do herbivorous animals have in common?**



Herbivores

Herbivores are animals that eat plants to survive. They have specially adapted features that allow them to consume and process plant materials.

Many classes of animals are herbivorous.

Many mammals are herbivorous. Marsupials such as kangaroos eat grasses and leaves and possums for example, eat fruits from trees.

Domestic animals such as goats, cows and horses graze on grass. Wild animals such as zebras, giraffes, deer and buffalo also graze on grasses and leaves.

Examples of herbivorous insects include butterflies, moths and grasshoppers. The larvae stage of many insects are also herbivorous. Many caterpillars, for example eat the leaves of plants.

Many birds are herbivorous. Their main source of food are seeds from plants. Some birds also eat fruit from trees.

Teeth of Herbivorous Mammals

Herbivorous mammals have teeth that are well adapted to crushing fibrous plant materials.

The front teeth, called incisors, are usually rectangular and are used to grasp and pull leaves from plants. The back teeth, called the molars, are usually flatter than carnivore molars. These teeth are used to crush and grind plant material.

Some herbivores don't have any canine teeth but those that do use them to clip vegetation off branches. Some animals seem to use these long, sharp teeth for reasons other than eating, such as for defence.

Many animals have developed digestive systems that are better able to process fibrous plant matter. Cows for example have four stomachs and spend a great deal of their day chewing plant matter in order to be able to digest it properly.



Teeth of Mammals that Gnaw

Mammals that gnaw through hard nuts, bark and seeds have special long-growing incisors (front teeth.) These teeth continue to grow as they are continually worn away through feeding.

Animals that have these types of teeth include rabbits and hares as well as members of the rodent family. Rodents include animals such as squirrels, chipmunks, beavers, mice and rats.

Some animals are able to gnaw through very hard vegetable matter. Beavers can gnaw right through the trunks of trees!



Above: The skull of a beaver and the front view of their incisors.

Top Right: a rabbit's incisors.

Bottom Right: A beaver can gnaw through wood.