



How to Measure a Horse

The height of a horse is measured in units of hands. The legend is that a king wanted to know how tall his favorite horse was. He didn't have anything to measure with so used the width of his hand, with fingers together and horizontal to the ground. Of course, the problem with this type of measuring is that people's hands are not all the same width. Today, the "hand" used to measure a horse has been standardized at 4 inches.

The height of a horse is measured from the ground to his withers, the last hair of his mane. If you are not sure where the withers are located, put a small treat like a bit of apple or carrot on the ground in front of the animal. Look at the shoulders when his puts his head down. The part of the shoulders that sticks up the highest when the head is down is the withers, the point that you measure to.

The horse must stand on a hard, flat surface such as a driveway or sheet of plywood. Put a long, straight stick on the ground next to the horse, even with his withers. The stick should be straight up-and-down and not leaning. Put a level at the withers sideways so that it touches the stick. Mark the stick where the bottom of the level touches it.

Use a tape measure to measure the number of inches from the bottom of the stick to the mark. Divide the number of inches by 4. If the number does not divide evenly into four, you will write what is left over as a decimal. For example, a horse measures 42 inches. If you divide 42 by 4 you will get 10 hands plus two inches. This is written 10.2HH or hh, which stands for "hands high." If the horse measures 42 ½ inches, you will include the fraction by writing 10.2 ½ HH. Remember, there would be no such thing as a measurement written 10.4HH, because the 4 stands for 4 inches, which is the length of a hand. Therefore, this horse would be 11HH. Do not use fractions smaller than 1/8 of an inch since a thick winter coat, hooves that haven't been trimmed lately, or new shoes can add to the height of the horse.

Measure the horse three times then average the readings if you have to. It is very hard to make an animal measure exactly the same every time.

Information from website of the American Donkey and Mule Society,
www.lovelongears.com