

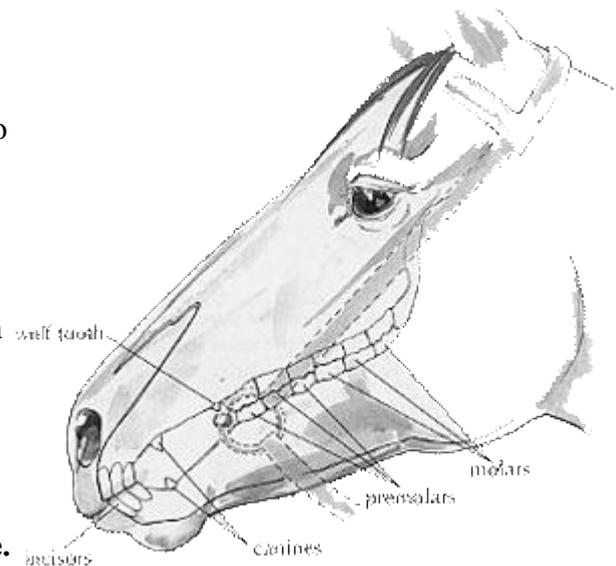
Horse health - Telling a horses age from teeth growth.

A horses age can often be accurately assessed by examining the horses teeth. This is an old, nearly forgotten art, that some equestrians take in their stride while others just wouldn't have a clue where to start.

As with anything worthwhile you have to learn the art by studying examples, both live and textbook. The images below should provide you with a good guide and help you make sure you never buy a green two year old that's being sold off as a five year old that's ready to bring on.



Horse teeth are often used to estimate age.



It was this that give rise to the old sayings 'long in the tooth' and 'Don't look a gift horse in the mouth'.

As a normal adult your horse has a minimum of 36 teeth. Your horse may also have up to four wolf teeth and/or canines.

All horses should have :

Six front teeth in the upper jaw, and six in the lower jaw.

These are called Incisors (biting teeth). and are used for tearing grass and other forage
The pair in the middle are called centrals.
The next pair on either side are the laterals,
The outer teeth are called corners.

Behind the incisors lie the powerful molars (cheek teeth).

Three pre-molars on each side of both jaws and three permanent molars, used for grinding food.
The grinding surfaces are called tables. They tilt downwards and outwards at 10-15 degrees.

The upper jaw is about 25% wider than the lower jaw, which moves in a circular motion, bringing the cheek teeth tables into contact.

An adult horse has 24 permanent molars. while an immature horse has only 12 temporary molars.

Newborn foals to one year:



Newborn foals will have their first incisors by the time they are a week old.

At two weeks old, they should have their second, third, and fourth premolars, also known as cheek teeth.

The first premolars are actually the wolf teeth, which don't appear until 5-6 months of age.

The last two sets of teeth your foal will produce are his second and third incisors which erupt at 4-6 weeks and 6-9 months respectively.

By one year old, your foal will have a mouth full of 24 deciduous baby teeth and two wolf teeth.

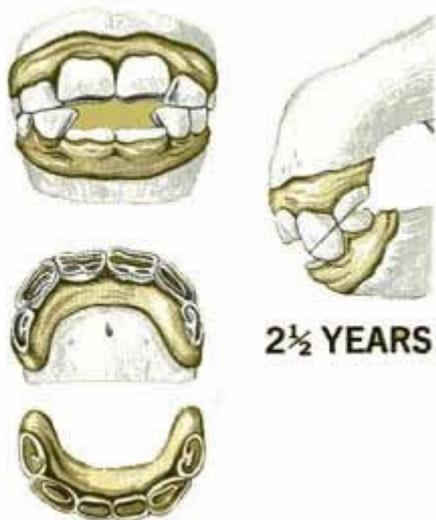
It's important to note that the wolf teeth are small teeth located directly in front of the premolars. They are often confused with the canines which are larger teeth located in the middle of the bars of the mouth.

Wolf teeth are only on the top, while canines are staggered on top and bottom. Often owners will have the wolf teeth removed at an early age to prevent irritation and interference with the bit.

Permanent teeth will start appearing when he is about a year old. The first molars erupt at 9-12 months. Second molars erupt at 2 years.

The most noticeable change owners will see is the eruption of the permanent incisors which are bigger and more rectangular than the baby teeth.

The 2.5 to 4.5 year old horse



The first permanent incisors will come in at 2 ½ years as will the second premolars.

Permanent central incisors have erupted but are not in contact. Lower incisors are not yet free of the gum over much of their surface.

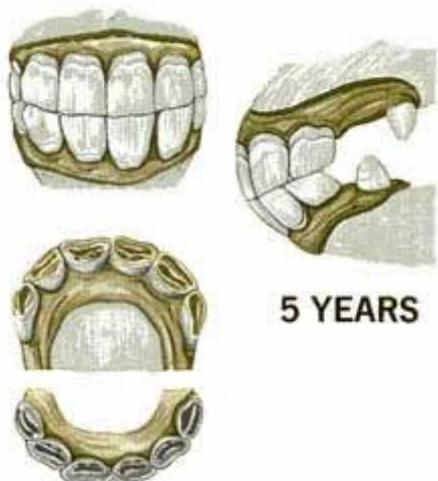
The chewing surface of the intermediates is worn to smooth.

Corners show definite wear.

The teeth then alternate their arrival with the 3rd premolars at 3 years, second incisors at 3 ½ years, 4th premolars at 4 years, and third incisors at 4 ½ years.

The third molars also come between 3 ½ - 4 years.

The five year old horse.



In male horses, the canines will appear in the bars of their mouth at 4 to 5 years of age.

Some mares may develop rudimentary canines depending on the presence of canines and wolf teeth.

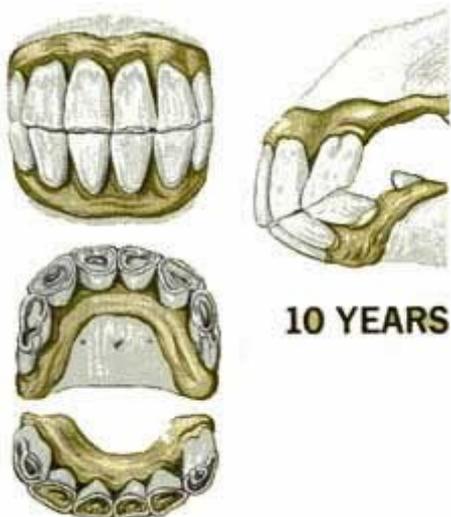
Permanent dentition is complete. All teeth are in wear.

The canine teeth have erupted fully. The centrals and intermediates show wear on the chewing surfaces, but cups are still visible and are completely encircled by enamel.

Corners are beginning to wear.

By the time your horse is five years old, all the permanent teeth should be through and the gums should be a healthy pink colour with no bruising.

The ten year old horse.



The angle of the horse's jaw and teeth is increasingly oblique.

The chewing surfaces of the lower centrals and intermediates are rounded.

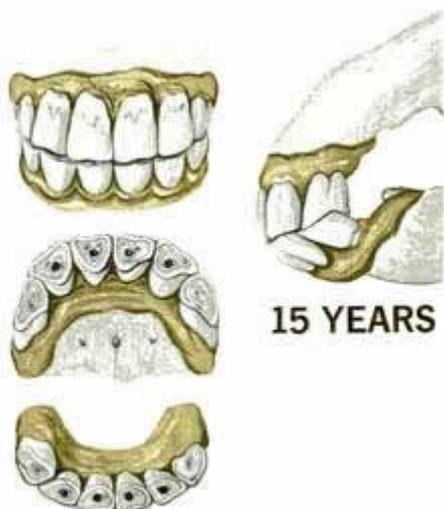
The dental star is more distinct and near the centre of the teeth.

Upper intermediates are nearly smooth with cups disappearing.

Galvayne's groove appears on the upper corner incisor.

Your adult horse will have 36 to 42 permanent teeth.

The fifteen year old horse.



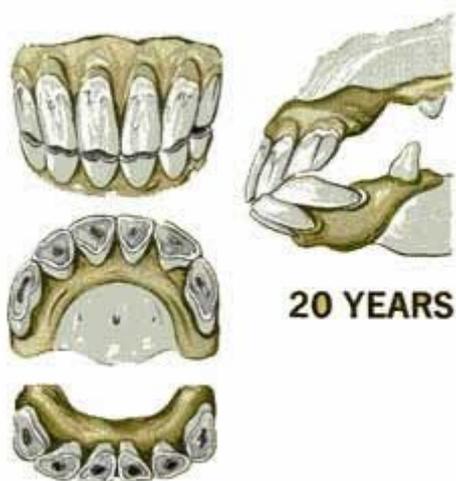
The lower incisors may appear shorter than the uppers when viewed from the front.

Galvayne's groove extends halfway down the outer (lip) side of the upper corner incisor.

The lower centrals and intermediates appear triangular on the chewing surface.

All incisors show a distinct dark round dental star in their centres.

The twenty year old horse.



Angulation of the jaw is distinctly oblique.

Galvayne's groove extends the entire length of the upper corner incisor.

All incisors are triangular.

Each dental star is round near the centre.

There is considerable spacing between the teeth.

The lowers may be worn almost to the gum.