

Just mention the word *pet* and chances are that someone will tell you a story about a beloved dog or cat. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) estimates that 62 percent of all households in the United States own a pet. Animals that live with humans have been domesticated, or tamed. The term *domestic* refers to the home, and *domestication* refers to the process by which animals or plants are brought to or near humans and their homes. The domestication of animals began during neolithic times.

Wolves and Dogs

The process of domestication was a gradual one. At first, man and animal probably lived in close proximity to, or near, one another. Around 30,000 years ago, wolves and humans may have even started to hunt together, or at least near one another. Humans and wolves were both trying to kill the same animals—for example, large mammals such as bison. Humans and wolves each had different skills. Wolves were fast, and humans had weapons. Each likely learned that there were benefits to continuing to hunt near one another: they might be able to share the same kill. As the wolves continued to hunt near humans, they would have grown used to the presence of humans.



Like early humans, wolves are hunters of large game animals.

At this point in time, nearly 30,000 years ago, animals were not yet domesticated, but the process was beginning. Humans likely started caring for stray wolf pups, turning them into the first pets. As dogs gradually descended from wolves, humans developed a close relationship with them. Since that time, dogs have been used for a variety of purposes: pulling sleds, protecting people, and hunting prey. Archaeologists believe dogs were domesticated in ancient Mesopotamia roughly 12,000 years ago. Dogs appear in paintings from ancient Egypt, sculptures from Assyria, and mosaics from Rome. However, dogs are not the only animals that humans have domesticated. Many other animals have been domesticated by humans and used for a variety of purposes, such as breeding and working.

Animals for Food and Work

By around 9000 BCE, humans in the Middle East began domesticating animals as a source of food. Rather than counting on a good hunting season, people began to raise their own animals. Pigs, cattle, sheep, and goats were good sources of protein. They also provided people with useful goods, such as wool

and milk. The animals' bones and horns were used to make arrow points and needles. Domesticating these animals not only changed the way people ate, it also gave them new tools and skills.

Also around 9000 BCE, a whole new way of life developed: nomadic herding. Nomadic herders were people who moved across a large region, tending their domesticated animals and making sure the animals had enough food and water. Within 2,000 years, cattle and pigs were also domesticated. Over the years, humans domesticated other species, such as horses, donkeys, camels, turkeys, and rabbits. The exact date of horse domestication is not known, but it occurred after the cow was domesticated. Rabbits were not domesticated until the Middle Ages, or about 1200 CE.

Over time, the relationship between man and animal extended beyond the use of animals for hunting and food sources. People discovered that cattle made good work animals. The strength of a cow or ox is greater than the strength of most humans. Evidence shows that by 4000 BCE, oxen were being harnessed to plows and wagons. Animals that perform work for humans in this manner are often referred to as “beasts of burden.”



The strength of oxen makes them well suited to help humans with the work of pulling carts and wagons.

In addition to these original uses, animals served an additional role—that of companions. By 3000 BCE, cats were living with humans. People enjoyed the company and companionship, and the cats were protected from predators. Cats helped keep human living areas clean by killing rodents. In Egypt, cats were so respected that they were considered sacred. In fact, Egyptians often mummified their deceased cats.

In many parts of the world, domesticating animals became a way for people to make money. Animals were—and still are—viewed as a sign of wealth. In the Middle East and Africa, for example, animals are used as dowries. A dowry is the wealth that a woman brings to her marriage. A woman with greater wealth, or more animals, will likely gain the respect of her husband's family. In addition to serving as a sign of a woman's wealth, animals can be used in business deals. In some parts of the world, such as Africa, animals are still used as a means of

bartering, or trading. A person might trade a cow for grain, for example. Domesticated animals have always played a large role in bartering, which is the oldest type of business transaction. Animals have also been used by politicians. If local political leaders give people the gift of an animal, it can make them feel loyalty to this leader.

Breeding and Domestication

Early humans did not know how genetics, or DNA, affected breeds of animals. However, they knew that breeding animals of the same color, for example, resulted in more animals of the same color. The Romans wanted black dogs as guard dogs and white dogs as sheep dogs, so they controlled the dogs' breeding. By manipulating genes in breeding, people could change the way animals looked or behaved. People began to breed animals for traits they wanted, such as the ability to give more milk.

With breeding, people can choose which animals to mate in order to get the characteristics they want. Animals bred in captivity often take on different characteristics from those in the wild. Within a few generations, the domesticated animals usually became smaller. Domestic animals may have more spots and colors than their wild counterparts. Domestic animals tend to have curlier tails and floppier ears than wild ones. Wild birds usually molt, or shed their feathers, but domesticated chickens do not. Domesticated animals also have different reproductive patterns. Wild animals usually only mate in a certain season, but most domesticated animals can reproduce at any point in the year. These traits are true for a number of species, such as pigs and cows.

Not all animals can be domesticated. In fact, only about 15 of the 148 large mammal species have been domesticated. Zebras, for example, have never been successfully domesticated, even though they are closely related to horses. Still, there is no doubt that the domestication of animals has brought great changes to the world. Animals such as cows, horses, and dogs live closely with humans. They depend on humans for their survival. Domesticated animals have also greatly changed the way humans live. They provide us with food, they help us work, and they give us companionship. Can you imagine your life without domesticated animals?

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** How did domesticating animals change life for humans?
 - A.** Human families became smaller to conserve food.
 - B.** Humans no longer had to plant grains.
 - C.** Animals provided humans with a reliable food source.
 - D.** Humans could no longer go hunting for food.

- 2.** What is a possible way that dogs became domesticated?
 - A.** Humans captured wolves that were trying to attack human camps.
 - B.** Wolves abandoned pups near human camps on purpose.
 - C.** Humans found several different breeds of dogs in the wild and brought them home.
 - D.** Humans took in stray wolf pups and cared for them.

- 3.** Which of the following is one way that domesticated animals are different from wild animals?
 - A.** Domesticated animals never have the diseases that wild animals do.
 - B.** Domesticated animals can breed more often than wild animals.
 - C.** Domesticated animals are usually larger than wild animals.
 - D.** Domesticated animals have more developed survival skills than wild animals.

- 4.** Domesticated animals are different from wild animals. Discuss at least three differences between wild and domestic animals. Provide details and evidence to support your answer.