

## Fun Facts Friday: Not All Hay is the Same

Elephants have a single-chamber stomach and rely on hindgut fermentation, a digestive system adapted for frequent, continual intake throughout the day rather than large meals.

Elephants naturally digest only about 45–50% of the food they eat. The remainder passes through largely undigested and is expelled as well-formed, nutrient-rich boluses that can support the growth of grasses, vegetables, fruits, and even trees, sometimes functioning as a stand-alone garden ecosystem.

Due to their digestive system, elephants require high-quality hay that is low in protein, high in fiber, and low in sugar.

Timothy hay ranks highest, followed by Bermuda grass. Orchard grass and oat hay are less suitable due to higher sugar levels and lower fiber content. Alfalfa should not be fed as a staple because it is too high in protein and too low in fiber for most elephants.

Unlimited access to dense or overly rich hay can lead to excessive intake, poor digestion, weight gain, and colic. Offering measured amounts of high-quality hay across multiple feedings helps support steadier digestion and a healthier body condition.

Elephants are built to move. Smaller, spaced feedings encourage walking and continual movement, which benefits joint health and circulation.

Elephant feeding works best when it aligns with elephant biology.

Photo: Mundi, Bo, and Tarra enjoying their breakfast hay

