

RealSorcerer's PF2 Animal Guide



All About Animal Companions

Just as my other guide covers Crafting and the crafting subsystem, this guide will examine Nature and the animal companion system. The Nature skill allows you to command animals, but this plays out in two very different ways depending on where you found the critter.

In the first part of this guide we'll go over the basic rules and discuss the worst case scenario; Trying to command a regular animal that is *not* your Animal Companion. This system is generally okay during

Exploration and Downtime mode, but can be frustrating and difficult in combat. We will especially focus on riding horses, as most characters will need to do this at some point in their career.

The second chapter will cover Animal Companions; buddies you gain from your class that level up with you. These friends are significantly easier to work with during combat, but they interact with the command system in a very different way that may be confusing on your first read-through.

Finally, the last section will focus on character build options and mechanics for players who want to optimize their use of the Command an Animal system or gain an animal companion.

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Chapter 1 - Command an Animal

The primary function of the Nature skill is to recall knowledge about geography, weather, and natural creatures, and to identify Primal magic. But Nature also has an entire system dedicated to working with animals; making friends with them, telling them what to do, and teaching them new tricks.

Before we get into the mechanics, I think it would be helpful to define what Pathfinder considers to be an “animal”. Animals are not necessarily real creatures, and include some surprising entries like griffins and purple worms. Animals also include previously separate categories like “Vermin” which used to cover arachnids, insects, and crustaceans. Animals are separated from Beasts by their Intelligence, typically having an Int modifier of -4 and being unable to speak or train in Intelligence skills.

Now let’s get started. You buy a horse or find a nice dog and want to tell it to do something. You’ll need to use the **Command an Animal** action. This involves rolling a **Nature check** against the animal’s **Will DC** (usually 10 + it’s Will save bonus). If your GM likes you they might lower this DC if you command it to do something it would do anyway or if you offer it snacks or something (ex. telling a riding horse to walk is an easy check when no danger is present). This can be done Untrained, but it’s often a tough DC. For example, a normal riding horse is a DC 15 before any modifiers.

- **Success:** The animal does as you command on its turn.
- **Failure:** The animal is hesitant or resistant, and it does nothing.
- **Critical Failure:** The animal misbehaves or misunderstands, and it takes some other action determined by the GM.
- **The animal is unfriendly or hostile:** The check automatically fails
- **The animal is friendly or helpful:** Treat your degree of success as one level higher.

Basic Commands

Once you succeed on your check you can give 1 to 3 commands. Each of these requires 1 action, essentially trading your actions and giving them to the animal. If you want the critter to move twice and then attack, that’s all 3 of your actions. You only need to succeed on the Nature check once regardless of how many commands you give, but you’ll need a new check next round if you want to keep telling the animal what to do.

- **Basic Actions:** Most animals know the Leap, Seek, Stand, Stride, and Strike actions.
- **Special Actions:** If the animal has a special action, like a horse’s Gallop, you must spend the same number of command actions to make them use that ability (2 in the case of Gallop).
- **Unclear Orders:** If the commands aren’t clear or the animal isn’t able to complete them (because something has changed since you gave the order), the GM determines how an animal interprets your instructions.
- **Incomplete Actions:** If an animal runs out of actions before it can complete all your commands, it does not continue them on its next turn. You’ll need to give new orders.
- **Conflicting Orders:** If multiple characters command the same animal, the GM again determines how the animal reacts. The easiest resolution is using the higher Nature check.
- **No Commands?** If you fail to spend an action to command the animal, it defaults back to the control of the GM who determines what makes sense for the situation.

Fear (and Loathing)

In combat, most animals like horses and ponies will lose their minds. They become **Frightened 4** and begin **fleeing** for as long as they have the Frightened condition. If you can succeed at a Nature check to Command an Animal, you can stop it from running away and give it instructions as normal. This doesn't remove the Frightened condition, and if it is attacked or damaged it begins running away again. Each turn it is not attacked, it's Frightened condition lowers by 1. You'll need to continue to make Nature checks to prevent fleeing until it is no longer afraid or combat is over.

- **Dismount!** If you are riding an animal that may become frightened by combat, use an action to dismount on your first turn of the encounter.
- **Combat trained** animals such as warhorses and warponies are chill and don't become frightened or flee during combat or when attacked and damaged.
- **Animal Companions** also do not become frightened or flee from combat. They can still be affected by other fear effects and spells as normal.

Mounted Combat

Mounting a creature takes 1 action, assuming it is willing and is at least one size larger. Mounts act on your initiative and must be commanded every round to spend their actions. Otherwise they essentially do nothing but defend. Sitting on top of a horse or other mount has a number of benefits and drawbacks

- **Initiative:** Mounted creatures act on your initiative, not on their own. If you command it to Stride, it does so immediately.
- **Mounted Offense:** You and your mount share the Multiple Attack penalty. So if you attack and then command your mount to attack, it takes a -5.
- **Jousting:** A weapon like the lance can be wielded in one hand while mounted, but this reduces its damage to the listed amount (1d6 for a lance). If your steed moves at least 10 ft, add a Circumstance bonus to damage equal to the number of weapon dice.
- **Mounted Defense:** A larger mount grants Lesser Cover (+1 AC) if the mount would be in the way, such as melee attacks from unmounted medium or small creatures. However, you take a -2 penalty on Reflex saves and the only Move action you can take is to Dismount.
- **Size Increase:** On a Large mount, you can be attacked from any square adjacent to your mount, but you can also attack those squares if you have a 5 or 10-ft reach. If you have a 15-ft reach (such as a whip), you can attack any square within 10 ft of your mount. If the mount is Medium or smaller, use your standard reach.
- **Mount Trait:** If a creature does not have the Mount trait it cannot use a Support ability while mounted and can only use its Stride speed (no Climb, Fly, etc).
- **Knockout!** If your mount is knocked out or killed while moving, you'll need to attempt a Reflex save to avoid being thrown into another square and dropping Prone. A DC 20 is given as the example to land safely.

Riding Intelligent Creatures

You can basically ride anything that is larger than yourself, but the game usually assumes it's a quadruped of animal-intelligence. In cases where you're riding an intelligent creature like a centaur or unicorn, the Core Rules suggest swapping Nature checks to a social skill like Diplomacy. If the "mount" is another player (ex. a goblin riding on the shoulders of a human), the Core rules suggest both characters use at least one hand to hold onto each other and they both use an action each turn to remain mounted. This is clarified further in the playtest for Summoner. When riding a normally independent creature (such as your Eidolon), both of you get 1 less action on your turn.

All About Horses

Now that we have all that information, let's get specific. As an adventurer, you're probably going to need to ride a mundane horse, dog, camel, or pony at some point in your adventures. As mentioned before, using Nature to command these animals to move will usually be a DC 10 + their Will save bonus. For the standard issue Riding Horse this is a tough **DC 15**. At lower levels that's a tall order, especially for characters who don't spec into Nature or Wisdom. Other types of mounts are all around the same difficulty. In situations where there is no stress or danger, such as traveling on the road, I would recommend waiving this check.

Riding Dog vs Riding Pony

If you're a small character, get a riding dog. They have better HP, AC, skills, and attack rolls *and* are cheap enough to get at 1st level along with your regular gear. The only advantage the pony has is it's greater carrying capacity and it's gallop action, which gives it more speed during a double move.

Warhorse & Warpony

Once you have enough money saved up, it is *highly* recommended that you trade in your old riding animals and upgrade to the "war" variety. In addition to greater survivability from their higher hp and other traits, they are also combat trained. This means they don't flee or become frightened from combat and are proficient in heavy barding.

Guard Dog & Pack Animal

Beyond level 1, guard dogs aren't any more effective at spotting danger than a player and they only have 8 hp that never increases. It also doesn't say anywhere that they are combat trained, meaning they'll likely run in fear if danger does present itself.

I can't find actual stats anywhere for a "Pack Animal", which is strange because we need to know how much Bulk they can carry. I assume from the price and "Horse" tag that it is intended to be a **donkey**. I'd recommend using a level -1 pony for this purpose.

Camels?

Strangely, camels only appear as animal companions and don't have a separate entry for purchasing one. This seems like a huge oversight considering how common they are. Based on their companion stats, they would be almost identical to riding horses except for their environmental toughness and slower speed. It's easy to put together their stats if needed.

Critter	Family	Level	Rental Price*/per day	Purchase Price	Will DC
Guard Dog	Dog	-1	1 cp per day	2 sp	14
Riding Dog	Dog	1	6 cp per day	4 gp	15
Pack Animal	Horse	?	2 cp per day	2 gp	?
Riding Horse	Horse	1	1 sp per day	8 gp	15
Warhorse	Horse	2	1 gp per day	30 gp	16
Riding Pony	Pony	1	8 cp per day	7 gp	14
Warpony	Pony	2	8 sp per day	24 gp	15

Chapter 2 - Animal Companions

Animal Companions are gained through your class and don't require training or spending gold (although you can always roleplay meeting them). They level up with you much like a player character, gaining more hp and higher proficiency bonuses. Companions have the **Minion** trait, meaning they are typically restricted to 2 actions each turn and can't take reactions.

In stark contrast to regular animals, animal companions don't require a Nature check to command. You simply spend 1 action to give them orders, and they gain 2 actions to follow those orders. In practice, this means both of you have 2 actions each turn so long as you are able to give commands.

- **Command Traits:** In most cases your commands are verbal and have the auditory and concentrate qualities.
- **Full Control:** Unlike with regular animals, the player adjudicates how their companion interprets orders. For example, instead of taking the most direct or safe route to a destination, the player chooses the animal's exact path.
- **No Commands:** If not given commands, companions take no action except to defend themselves or escape obvious harm. After 1 minute they typically follow their instincts. Some feats grant companions a single action each turn if they are left without orders.
- **Familiars:** While they belong to a whole different rules set, familiars also follow the pattern of trading 1 of your actions to give them 2 actions.

Upgrading Your Buddy

Even the base animal companion will level up with you, but if you want it to see combat that may not be good enough. Animal Companions have three upgrade tiers; Mature, Advanced, and Specialized. These are taken as class feats and add additional stat boosts, proficiency increases, and other unique traits. Druids, Beastmasters, and Cavaliers get these slightly earlier than Champion and Ranger. It's worth noting that the Champion's feats have different names than the standard progression.

Young Companion, lvl 1 or 3 - The starter friend you gain from the Animal Companion feat is Trained in unarmed attacks and unarmored defense, all barding, all saving throws, Perception, Acrobatics, and Athletics. It's ability score modifiers are Str +2, Dex +2, Con +1, Int -4, Wis +1, Cha +0, and it gains 6 hit points per level you have. Each species of animal will add additional modifiers, ancestry HP, an extra trained skill, different unarmed attacks, and a Support ability. The Advanced maneuver listed under each animal is not available until you take the Incredible Companion feat. With the exception of companions with the Mount trait, most companions start off as Small size.

- **Ape** - The great ape has a climb speed and the ability to apply frightened 1. They aren't proficient with weapons, but you can probably find a creative use for their hands. High level apes should take the Bully specialization to help boost their Demoralize attempts.
- **Arboreal Sapling** - The only plant on the list, the sapling can create difficult terrain and later gains a ranged attack. The difficult terrain isn't too useful until the sapling is larger.
- **Badger** - Their support ability can prevent foes from taking 5 ft steps. Advanced badgers can Rage, dealing a fair amount of extra damage. However, they can't end their rage voluntarily.
- **Bat** - Our first flying companion. Bats can use hearing as a *precise* sense, allowing them to locate the exact space of invisible enemies. Most characters only have imprecise hearing, which just tells you something is present.
- **Bear** - If a bear has difficulty hitting, it's support ability lets it add bonus damage to your attacks instead. Advanced bears can auto-grab with their strikes.
- **Bird** - Twice as fast as bats, birds have the ability to deal bleed damage and dazzle enemies. Advanced birds can move in and out of melee while staying out of reach.
- **Boar** - This feral hog can deal hefty amounts of bleed damage. Advanced boars have a charge attack, letting them get into the fray very quickly.
- **Camel** - Camels have the Mount trait and are almost identical to horses. However, they can ignore one type of extreme temperature and are slightly slower. Advanced camels can ignore some difficult terrain. Generally I would choose a horse unless you know the climate of the campaign ahead of time.
- **Cat** - A great companion for Rogues and other stealthy characters, cats make it easy to apply the flat-footed condition and deal a bit of sneak attack damage.
- **Cave Gecko** - A bit of an oddball, geckos have lower damage but can prevent you from critical failing combat maneuvers. As expected, they also have a climb speed. Advanced geckos have a short range grab.
- **Cave Pterosaur** - The first companion with darkvision, pterosaurs are just as fast as birds but have lower hp. Curiously, they have Thievery as a trained skill, perhaps letting them snatch loot from foes.
- **Crocodile** - Larger crocs have the potential to immobilize opponents, keeping them slowed and grounded. Advanced crocs can easily knock enemies prone. The downside is they are a bit slower than other animals.
- **Dromaeosaur** - The absolute best flanking buddy in the game, dromaeosaurs offer a lot of tactical options for scuttling around in melee. And they fast as Hell. If your GM doesn't like dinosaurs, ask to refluff them as a cassowary instead.
- **Horse** - Our second Mount option, horses are your go to default. Along with their speed, their support option adds a small amount of damage to weapon attacks while made after a move.
- **Hyena** - Just as fast as horses but slower than dromaeosaurs, hyenas are a nice option. They can apply frightened 1, and advanced hyenas can apply bleed and slow. This is another animal that benefits from Bully specialization.
- **Monitor Lizard** - The strangest Mount option, monitor lizards don't move much faster than regular characters. Their support option has a very low chance of success.
- **Riding Drake** - The fastest Mount option and the only mount with darkvision. Advanced drakes have a modest fire breath weapon for characters who lack AoE attacks. The downside is they are **Uncommon**.
- **Scorpion** - This giant bug can deal a mean amount of extra damage, both immediate and ongoing. Advanced scorpions have a neat grab and sting combo. Oh, and darkvision.
- **Shark** - The only fully aquatic companion, sharks have ridiculously long range scent and the Bear's support damage ability. If you're in an oceanic game this is kinda it.

- **Snake** - Having a climb and swim speed is cool, but having a slow land speed is not. An advanced snake can deal fixed damage with its constrict, but doesn't add any modifiers.
- **Vulture** - Vultures fall between the bat and bird on speed and can apply the Sickened condition. Bad news for any alchemists you meet. The real sell here is that advanced vultures can heal themselves!
- **Wolf** - Wolves have a bit more speed and damage than cats and can apply a speed debuff. Advanced wolves can easily knock targets prone.

Mature Companion, lvl 4 or 6 - The companion increases its Str, Dex, Con, and Wis modifier by 1. It's unarmed attack damage becomes two dice, and its Proficiency rank for Perception and Saves becomes Expert. It's Proficiency in Intimidation, Stealth, and Survival become Trained, or Expert if they were already Trained. Finally, Medium or smaller companions grow by one size.

Advanced Companion, lvl 8 or 10 - Feats such as Incredible Companion allow you to choose from a small list of templates that can be applied to a mature companion. The Core options are Nimble and Savage. All advanced options treat the animal's natural attacks as magic and add additional damage. Lastly, they let the animal use the Advanced maneuver based on its type.

- **Indomitable** - Essentially the tank archetype, the animal's Con mod improves by 2 and it's proficiency with Barding increases to Expert. Note that this option is tied to "megafauna" companions, which use the exact same stats as regular companions but look more prehistoric. Otherwise this restriction is purely aesthetic.
- **Nimble** - The agility archetype, improving the animal's unarmored defense to Expert and its Dexterity modifier by 2. This is also the only option that doesn't increase the animal's size. So if you don't want your critter to get too big for doors and hallways, go Nimble. All around a solid choice for speedy mounts, scouts, and flanking companions.
- **Savage** - The offensive archetype, improving the animal's Strength mod by 2, in addition the other usual benefits like Expert Athletics and damage increase. Because Savage does not get an inherent defense boost like the others, I would only pick this for your pure damage companions when you are restricted to core rules only.
- **Genie-Touched** - A Rare option, genie-touched has four subgroups based on the four kinds of genies; Air, Earth, Fire, and Water. These either grant Expert in Athletics or Acrobatics. In addition to ability boosts, the animal gains a small amount of elemental damage and elemental resistance.

Specialized Companion, lvl 14 or 16 - The final upgrade grants some significant boons in addition to allowing you to pick from a long list of extra goodies. The baseline increases are Expert in unarmed attacks, Master in Perception, Dex mod +1, Int mod +2, and increasing its unarmed damage from two to three dice. Lastly, its unarmed attacks get an increased flat damage boost from 2 to 4 or from 3 to 6.

- **Ambusher** - An unarmored defense increase and Stealth increase for sneaky critters. A great choice for Nimble companions that hide with you.
- **Bully** - A major boost to Intimidation and Charisma for scary critters. An interesting choice for Savage and offensive companions to demoralize foes.

- *Daredevil* - Grants Deny Advantage and increase to unarmored defense. The best choice for Nimble companions.
- *Racer* - A 10 ft speed increase along with Fort and Con boosts. The best choice for Indomitable or heavily armored companions.
- *Tracker* - Full speed when tracking and Survival and Wis boosts. A more niche option you might choose for scouts, but generally Ambusher or Daredevil are better.
- *Wrecker* - Attacks ignore half an object's hardness. Increase to Athletics and Str. The safest choice for raw damage Savage companions.

Genie-Touched companions have four unique specializations based on their element.

- *Deep Diver* - Grants any animal a Swim speed and improves Barding to Expert.
- *Steadfast Strider* - Ignores earth-related difficult terrain and improves Barding to Expert.
- *Wildfire Scorchers* - Improved fire resistance and a damaging fire aura. Legendary in Reflex saves and Expert in unarmored defense.
- *Wind Chaser* - 20 ft speed boost, Legendary in Reflex saves and Expert in unarmored defense.

Chapter 3 - Equipment & Companion Items

There are a scant few items that specifically apply to animals and animal companions, and even fewer that work for critters other than horses. There's nothing explicitly preventing animals from using magic items that would fit on their frame, but they have several harsh limitations on items;

- **Item Bonus:** The only item bonuses they can benefit from are Speed and Armor. Their maximum AC bonus from items is +3 (usually from heavy barding).
- **Investment:** Animals only have 2 points to invest in magic items rather than 10.
- **Activation:** Animals can't learn the Activate An Item basic action.

Tack (Riding gear) - Level 0, Price 4 gp

A saddle, stirrups, bit & bridle all cost about 4 gp. Their bulk is 2 when held and 1 when worn. Very pricey at 1st level, but a must have once you own a mount.

Saddlebags - Level 0, Price 2 sp

These come in a pair and can hold up to 3 bulk each. They are 1 bulk when held and light when worn. If you trust your mount to guard your swag, this is an easy purchase.

Bullhook - Level 3, Price 55 gp

A magic pokie-stick that grants a +2 item bonus on Command an Animal checks and allows you to cast the *command* spell on animals once per day. Unless you're really having trouble, I would recommend looking for an item that provides a broader bonus to Nature checks in general.

There is a level 12 Greater version, but the item bonus doesn't increase. Instead, the save DC for the command spell is now 30. Might be useful for taming purple worms?

Horseshoes of Speed - Level 7, Price 340 gp

A +5 ft boost to speed and a +2 bonus to Athletics checks for jumping. They're cheaper than Boots of Speed and counteract some penalties of light barding. The downside is they only work for hoofed animals unless your GM is willing to refluff them as anklets or shoes.

Collar of Inconspicuousness - Level 8, Price 475 gp

In addition to disguising your crocodile when it's time to visit town, this is also a convenient item to shrink a large creature when you need to move through confined spaces. The collar transforms the wearer into a Tiny animal of the same kind, as the Pest Form spell. And it's usable at will! I don't know what the tiny version of a horse is. Maybe a miniature pony.

Collar of Empathy - Level 9, Price 600 gp

This collar provides the old empathic bond ability, letting you sense your animal's emotions and needs. At will, you can see through your animal's senses instead of your own. This would be great for scouting, but you have no control over where the animal goes or what it looks at. You could also use it to find a lost companion, but by level 9 I feel you'll have other options.

Star Spangled Rider's Suit - Level 9, Price 700 gp

A +1 resilient suit of studied leather armor made of, uh, sparkling sequins? Well okay then. Obviously intended for a performer, this armor grants a +2 item bonus to command animals you are riding and grants your mount the Drop Prone and Step actions. It also allows you to dismount as a reaction in response to damage.

Barding of the Zephyr - Level 10, Price 900 gp

Literally the only magic barding in the game right now, and it's not super exciting. This is light barding, with no heavy variation. It provides a constant feather fall effect and a 1/day Fly speed for 10 minutes. It's not terrible if you have the gold, but there are other ways to get these effects.

Greater Horseshoes of Speed - Level 14, Price 4,250 gp

A + 10 ft boost to speed and a +3 bonus to Athletics for jumping. If you're using heavy barding, I would get these at some point to neutralize the speed penalty. But they aren't a vital must-have. Just get them when you have the extra gold.

Barding

Regular animals are considered trained in light barding, while Animal Companions and combat trained animals like warhorses are proficient in all barding. Sadly, barding cannot be enchanted with magic runes like other armor, although unique magic barding exists. Barding is priced based on the animal's size, with two different sets for Large creatures and smaller/medium creatures. Barding also requires a minimum Strength modifier, shown on the far right column.

The choice on whether to get barding or not really comes down to build. Animal Companions with the Nimble advancement or the Ambusher and Daredevil specializations will be better off using their unarmored defense. Companions with the Indomitable advancement become Expert with barding. Savage companions should use whatever their strength allows for.

Mundane animals never get improved defenses, so if you have the money to spare it's worth getting more armor on them. A warhorse with heavy barding will top out at 20 AC.

Size	Price	AC Bonus	Dex Cap	Check Pen.	Speed Pen.	Bulk	Min. STR
Light (S/M)	10 gp	+1	+5	-1	-5 ft	2	+3
Light (Large)	20 gp	+1	+5	-1	-5 ft	4	+3
Heavy (S/M)	25 gp	+3	+3	-3	-10 ft	4	+5
Heavy (Large)	50 gp	+3	+3	-3	-10 ft	8	+5

Vehicles

Things change a lot when you hook up your animal to a wagon. The vehicle system is its own beast (pun intended) that I won't go into full detail here. Rather than commanding an animal, you make a Pilot check. **Pilot checks** either use the Nature DC shown on the chart below, or an easier Lore check using a specialization like Driving Lore. The range given in Nature DC is only explained as "depending on the pulling creature". I would recommend using the lower end for regular animals like oxen and horses and the higher end for something exotic like griffins.

Note that the Passengers listed below are in addition to the Driver. This means the usual wagon or carriage isn't big enough for a standard party and one or two people will need to find their own transportation.

Vehicle	Level	Passengers	Animal Power	Purchase Price	Nature DC
Cart	0	1	1 Large creature	3 gp	16 to 24
Light Chariot	0	0	1 Large creature	10 gp	16 to 24
Wagon	1	2	2 Large creatures	25 gp	17 to 25
Sleigh	1	1	2 Large or 6 Medium	50 gp	17 to 25
Carriage	2	2	2 Large creatures	100 gp	18 to 26
Heavy Chariot	3	3	2 Large creatures	150 gp	20 to 28

The vehicle rules don't explain what happens if the pulling creature is your animal companion. I would recommend forgoing the Pilot check for regular actions like moving and stopping, and using an easy Pilot check (perhaps the Driving Lore DC) for reckless or uncontrolled actions.



Chapter 4 - Character Builds

This is a build you can invest in as little or as much as you want without there being any wrong answers. On the lighter end, you're really just looking to be able to sit on a horse and make it walk. A character with the **Ride** feat does this without any further investment. Or maybe you only take the **Animal Companion** feat and don't go any further than that, giving you a scaling companion that's a little more durable. On the opposite end is a build entirely dedicated to your companion, taking multiple feats to make it as strong as another party member.

Being trained in the Nature skill and having high Wisdom are not vital for characters with animal companions because they automatically succeed at command checks. However, they are helpful for characters who want to ride or train non-companions.

Ancestry

Since no checks are involved, no ancestry is bad at using animal companions, and only those with a Wisdom flaw will have issues with Nature rolls. It is worth noting that small-sized characters will be able to ride medium-sized animals, which can make life easier when it's time to enter a dungeon.

Gnome - In addition to the small size, gnomes have feats that let them talk directly to burrowing animals using Diplomacy. Perhaps this has synergy with badger companions?

Goblin - If you're playing in the Golarian setting, then horses *hate* goblins. So much so that they will try to buck them off. This likely only applies to regular horses and not horse animal companions.

- **Rough Rider**: Grants the Ride feat early and a +1 circumstance bonus to command goblin dogs and wolves. Also adds wolf as an option to all animal companion lists (like Champion).

Halfling - A Wisdom bonus and small size allow halflings to easily tame and ride Medium animals.

- **Prairie Rider**: Trained in Nature and +1 circumstance bonus to command riding dogs and ponies.

Humans - I almost hate including humans on these lists but they basically fix any shortcomings in a build. You can grab the Ride feat early and not have to worry about rolling.

Orc - As it turns out, orcs enjoy training animals. If you aren't interested in that part they're just average.

- **Beast Tamer**: Trained in Nature and grants the Train Animal feat.
- **Ferocious Beast**: Allows your animal companion or bonded animal to benefit from your Orc Ferocity and Undying Ferocity feats.

Background

In most cases, backgrounds won't be super impactful for your build. If you aren't looking to maximize your rolls or train animals, just pick a different one that better matches your character.

Animal Whisperer, **Animal Wrangler**, **Mammoth Speaker**, and the...**Menagerie Dung Sweeper** all provide a Wisdom boost, the Nature skill, and the Train Animal feat.

Herbalist - While Natural Medicine isn't directly tied to animals, it is a great feat since we're already investing in Nature and Wisdom.

Outrider - Grants a Wisdom boost and Nature skill, but gives you the Express Rider feat. As we'll discuss later this feat is useless unless there are time sensitive elements in your game.

Scholar - You could choose to take Assurance (Nature) to make it easier to pass your Command checks. If you aren't taking Assurance for another skill it's not a bad choice.

Sally Guard Neophyte - Along with Wisdom and Nature, this background starts you off with a riding horse and a collection of shoddy gear. Really play up that broke hedge knight. May not be available in all campaigns due to being setting specific.

Class

Currently there are three base classes that natively get a companion; Champion, Druid, and Ranger. All of them have access to the necessary feats for fully advancing their companions, so it really comes down to your playstyle and what you want from your base class.

Champion

As a champion, your animal companion class feature assumes a creature with the Mount trait. Without GM permission, that list is just the Horse or Camel. Your companion also isn't available until 3rd level. Even with those limitations, champions benefit greatly from having a mount, as they are the most likely to be weighed down by heavy armor and in desperate need of a speed boost.

Note that your feats have different names than normal, but they essentially do the same thing and appear at the same level as Ranger.

Loyal Warhorse - Level 6 (Mature Animal Companion)

Heal Mount - Level 8

Imposing Destrier - 10 (Incredible Companion)

Pale Horse - 12

Auspicious Mount - Level 16 (Specialized Companion)

Celestial Mount - Level 20

Druid

Druids are the only base class to get their companion upgrades early, and can take a level 20 capstone feat to make their companion temporarily Huge. They don't have any special synergy with their companion like the Ranger or Champion, but they are a full primal spellcaster on top of having a strong melee beast. And you'll still have some feats left over to round out your build.

Mature Animal Companion - Level 4

Incredible Companion - Level 8

Side By Side - Level 10

Specialized Companion - Level 14

Apex Companion - Level 20

Ranger

Rangers have the most synergy with their companions, being able to share their Hunt Prey bonuses and having access to several Focus spells specifically for their friend. In fact, they have a companion feat available at every level. Fully devoting your build to your animal will atrophy your own combat ability, but it's an option.

Heal Companion - Level 1

Magic Hide - Level 2

Companion's Cry - Level 4

Mature Animal Companion - Level 6

Enlarge Companion - Level 8

Incredible Companion - Level 10

Side By Side - Level 12

Stealthy Companion - Level 14

Specialized Companion - Level 16

Masterful Companion - Level 18

Barbarians - While having a wild beast friend is incredibly flavorful for barbarians, they cannot use the Command action while raging since it has the Concentrate tag. In emergencies, you can use Moment of Clarity to issue commands, but the action economy isn't great. Mounted barbarians should dismount as soon as combat starts.

Cleric - With their high Wisdom, Clerics with the Nature skill will have less trouble riding a horse, driving a wagon, or training a critter. Warpriests may even consider taking the Cavalier archetype to mimic the old spellcasting Paladin.

Investigator - Boasting tons of skills and skill feats, investigators can easily dip into other roles. Their native class feats are on the weak side, making Ranger Dedication or Beastmaster especially viable.

Rogue - Like the investigator, you've got more skills and feats than God. Rogues should consider the Beastmaster archetype to add a flanking or scouting companion. An Eldritch Trickster rogue could theoretically choose Druid Dedication and get a Wisdom boost.

Summoner (Playtest) - Instead of lame animals, summoners have an imaginary friend. A sidebar clarifies that riding your eidolon causes both of you to lose an action each turn (basically expending your Work Together ability). Eidolons aren't any faster than people, but with a few feats they can make okay mounts. The summoner action economy is slightly more flexible than companion classes, and eidolon's don't follow the same progression as animal companions.

Archetypes

While the Multiclass Dedication feats are usually very strong, in this case they are all two-feat investments to get an animal companion. And because of how multiclass feat-scaling works, you won't get the usual Mature and Advanced feats until much later. If your only goal is to get a mount, go Cavalier. If you want an animal companion for any other reason, go Beastmaster.

Animal Trainer - Level 2, Trained in Nature

While this archetype grants an animal companion right off the bat, it ignores their proficiency in other skills in favor of Performance. Unless you're doing a thematic circus Bard or have a specific concept I don't see this as an appealing option for the majority of builds.

Beastmaster - Level 2, Trained in Nature

Not only does the entry feat grant a companion, but this can be *in addition* to any animal companion you already have. If your first companion was specialized as a mount, you could pick up a combat animal or vice versa. Note that until higher levels you can't have all your friends active at once and you'll need to

spend 1 minute to swap them out. Beastmaster also has access to some of the best Ranger feats, allowing characters to skip Ranger Dedication if it doesn't provide anything to them.

Cavalier - Level 2, Trained in Nature or Society

If your goal is to get a mount you can ride in combat, Cavalier is the premier option. Like Beastmaster, Cavalier can upgrade their companion at the same rate as Druid. Even a Champion might want to go Cavalier if they took the weapon or shield instead of steed, or if they just want the faster progression.

Champion Dedication - Level 2, Str 14, Cha 14

The level 6 feat Divine Ally is needed to access the Champion's steed. This comes very late for characters wanting to incorporate an animal companion into their build. Unless you just want the Champion's armor proficiencies, Cavalier is the more expedient choice for mounted combat.

Druid Dedication - Level 2, Wis 14

You'll need to take at least two feats to get your companion, and you'll end up ignoring the interesting parts of Druid (like spellcasting and wild shape) to power up your animal. It's not a bad option, but as with the other multiclass feats it's very subpar.

Ranger Dedication - Level 2, Dex 14

With Beastmaster having access to most of the Ranger's companion feats, the only thing this dedication brings to the table is being able to share your **Hunt Prey** benefits with your companion. That's not nothing, but I would go Beastmaster unless something else in the Ranger line appeals to you.

Feats (and Hooves)

The majority of relevant feats tied to animals and Nature are skill feats, making them pretty easy to incorporate into a build. The exception is the general feat Ride, which we'll discuss further down. Most other Nature feats not listed here deal with Primal spellcasting.

Assurance - Level 1, Trained in a skill

You could just take Assurance (Nature) and automatically succeed at most command checks, but unless your build is really focused on Nature I wouldn't go this route. There are plenty of other skills to use Assurance on.

Express Rider - Level 1, Skill, Trained in Nature

The usefulness of this feat really depends on whether the campaign treats travel time as important. It allows you to make a Nature check to Command an Animal, increasing the distance you travel in a day by half. In games without time sensitive elements this likely has no effect.

Natural Medicine - Level 1, Skill, Trained in Nature

Since we're already using the Nature skill, why not do some healing? The least you can do is heal your animal and yourself to take some of the load off the party healer. The feat allows you to use Nature

instead of Medicine to Treat Wounds. This takes about 10 minutes and can be used on the same target once every hour. Success heals 2d8 hp. You can increase the DC or time spent to heal even more.

Ride - Level 1, General

You automatically succeed at commanding your mount to take move actions. Furthermore, your mount acts on your turn as if it were a Minion. If you mount a creature after combat has started, it cannot act immediately and goes on your next turn.

The major downside to this feat is that it competes for space with other early General feats like Toughness and Incredible Initiative. I would recommend retraining Ride once you are high enough level to make the check on your own.

Skill Training - Level 1, Skill

You're a lowly Fighter with only 3 skills? Get trained in Nature.

Train Animal - Level 1, Skill, Trained in Nature

This feat relies heavily on downtime and usually takes about a week. Normally I would recommend crafting during downtime, but Wisdom-based characters can try this instead. Train Animal allows you to teach an animal a new basic action *or* reinforce an action it already knows. Training an action it already knows (like Stride or Strike) allows you to command it to do that *without* a Nature check. Other basic actions (Core Rules pg 496) you might teach it could include Interact (for picking up objects or pushing open doors) or Point Out (to alert you to hidden things it has detected).

If you are an Expert in Nature you can ask your GM if you can train more rare or unusual creatures. This is pretty open ended, but perhaps train an orca or a triceratops?

With enough time, this might be a better investment than the Ride feat. Just remember that any non-companion animals you train could die any minute because of their fixed hit points. That's potentially a lot of wasted effort.

Suggestion: See if your GM will allow you to Combat Train animals with this feat. Otherwise there is no method within the rules to combat-train an animal.

Bonded Animal - Level 2, Skill, Expert in Nature

If you can't afford to spend a class feat on a companion but you have skill feats to spare, this is the next best thing. You spend a week of downtime being buddies with an animal, after which you make a DC 20 Nature check. If successful, the animal is always Helpful to you (unless you're a real butt). This improves your Command check results by one level (turning a Fail into a Success). You can only have one bonded animal at a time and can't also have a companion.

The trick here is not to befriend some common horse, but to become buddies with larger animals like rhinoceros, elephants, and dinosaurs. They won't level up like a companion, but they'll be much more durable than even a warhorse when you get into higher levels.