**Evolution in the Horse Family**

Horses evolved in North America, and fossils in Oregon reveal how natural selection shaped them.

The horse family survived ancient climate change by evolving to eat grass. The earliest horses were small animals that ate a variety of plants in tropical forests. When that habitat disappeared, horses that added grass to their diet were most successful.

Most later horses ate only grass, but dependence on one food source made these grazers vulnerable to extinction. Today, only one group of horses survives. As grazers, their fate now depends on stable grasslands.

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**How have horse body types changed over time?**

**What kind of plant/habitat supported the widest diversity of horses?**

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**EARLY HORSES**
The earliest horses belonged to the Eohippus grade group and were smaller than today’s brown horses. They had four-crowned teeth for eating broad plants, and four hoofed toes on each front foot and three hoofed toes on each back foot.

**MIDDLE HORSES**
As the landscape changed and the grass became more common, horses adapted to eating grass by losing their toes. Horses of this second group of horses, the Mesohippus, added grass to their diets. The members of this group were thinner in size—some small like early horses and others very large like modern horses.

**LATE HORSES**
Equids are the third group of horses. They evolved taller feet with simple four-crowned teeth and adapted to eating a lot of green grass. They branched into two sets, which took different directions in specializing for grassland life.

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**This diagram illustrates most North American horse evolution in Oregon over the last 35 million years.**