

Breeding Does

Breeding female goats

First let me start by saying PLEASE, DO NOT "run" your buck with you does. If you do, you will have no control over breeding and will have no idea when to expect kids. Because of this you will be unable to give the doe proper prenatal care and also will have no idea when she is due to kid. You will be unable to prepare and you will risk losing babies. Our bucks and does live very happy, separate lives, and only meet each other when we take them on "dates".

At what age can goats breed?

Believe it or not, a goat kid of either sex can be fertile at 7 weeks of age. That is not to say that they should be bred at this age. Intact bucks and does over 7 weeks of age should not be kept together because a young buck can, and *will*, breed a female at 2 months of age, this includes his mother and 2 month old sister!

At what age should I breed my does?

Full size dairy type goat does can be bred at about 8 months of age if they have "made weight". They should weigh at least 80 pounds.

I have heard of people who wait until a doe is 1 1/2 years old before breeding her. There is no reason to wait this long. People do this because they think the doe will grow better if you wait to breed her, but if the doe is well taken care of and fed properly she will grow just as well bred as unbred. We have personal experience with this matter. We have three kidding stalls and only breed three does in a "batch". We let the does have their personal clean stall with their kids for two weeks after kidding (they do get to come out during the day as the kids progress). Because of our breeding procedure, not all does get bred at the same time. We have had twin does where one fell into a "breeding batch" her first year but the second doe came into heat when we were not breeding. The second doe's heat dates never fell nicely into a convenient "batch" and because of this she never got bred before our breeding cut-off deadline of Jan. 1 (we don't breed after Jan. 1). So, one twin was bred when she was 80 pounds (about 8 - 9 months old) and the other twin didn't get bred until the next year, when she was 1 1/2 years old. By the time the both does reached two years of age, they were exactly the same size. I have seen this over and over and I know you can breed at 80 pounds/8 months. You just must make sure you take good care of, and properly feed, your bred does.

When can I expect my doe to come into heat so she can be bred?

As far as breeding goes, there are two "types" of goats:

- "Equatorial type" goats that come from climates that are hot all year long. These goats will breed all year long. Examples of these breeds are most meat breeds like Boers, Spanish & Fainting, and also Pygmies and (sometimes) Nubians.
- "Alpine type" goats. These are most of the Dairy breeds. These goats are seasonal breeders, like deer, and have a definite breeding season. This usually is from about Aug. to Dec/Jan. The does will come into heat about every 21 days and the bucks will stay in rut during the entire breeding season. Once the buck goes out of rut, they lose most of their interest in sex until the next rut.

How many years will a doe continue to produce babies?

How long can a doe keep safely breeding?

When should I "retire" my doe?

A doe will continue to go into heat and breed her entire life. She never goes through menopause like a human. Since the "normal" life span is 11-12 years, if exposed to a buck, she will continue to breed and have babies until she dies.

BUT, the cause of death for many older does is usually kidding/pregnancy related so if you wish to extend her life, you may decide to retire her at some point from kidding. If you decide to retire your doe, do not expose her to bucks any longer. She will continue to go into heat for the rest of her life.

Does that are "retired" from breeding around age 9 -10 live longer (16-20 years, and I just recently found a doe who was 24; she was retired from kidding at age 10).

Can I stagger breeding so that I can have milk year 'round?

It is very difficult to stagger dairy goat breeding due to the fact that most dairy goats are seasonal breeders (see above). This is why goat milk is practically nonexistent in the winter. Commercial goat milk producers manipulate their goats hormonally to breed year 'round. Our goats naturally come into heat in the Fall, so this is when they are bred. They kid in the late Winter/Early Spring. I milk in the Spring, Summer and Early Fall and put up milk (by freezing or making cheese) for Winter use. Also, even if the doe were to come into heat off-season, you'd need a buck who was in rut. Yes, they are seasonal as well, and may not breed a doe off season. We have a buck who will not breed a doe, even if she is in raging heat, after December because he goes into rut only from Sept.- Dec..

Can I breed my does again right after they kid?

Even if they were to come into heat after they kid (which they may not do) you really should wait to breed the doe. Kidding and lactating takes a lot out of a doe and she needs her rest between kiddings. Does should only be bred and kid once a year.

Can doe get pregnant when she is still nursing or being milked?

YES

Line-breeding and Inbreeding

The old saying goes: "If it works it's called Line-breeding and if it doesn't, it's called Inbreeding." This saying puts a very complicated subject very simply, but it has some truth in it. I also like to say: "There is no better way to improve your herd than with Line-breeding, BUT there is also no better way to ruin a herd."

Line breeding (breeding closely related animals) can quickly improve a herd because the good qualities of the animals get accentuated. BUT the bad qualities are also accentuated. Because of this, you have to think about what you are doing, look at the animals and use your head. You can't just simply go by some arbitrary "rule" like "it's OK to breed grandfather to granddaughter", but look at the individual goats and decide if their particular good traits outweigh the bad traits.

Since we only keep very good bucks, we do not worry that much about "bad" traits, since if our buck had discernable bad traits, we wouldn't use him for breeding purposes. We do do a lot of Line-breeding with our herd.

The only hard and fast rule that I know of is do not breed a full brother and full sister. In some circumstances, it is ok to breed father to daughter, but we hardly ever do that. We much prefer to breed grandfather to granddaughter, uncles to niece, etc.



I would recommend that unless you are an experienced breeder with good stock, you will probably have healthier animals by starting out incorporating genetic diversity into your herd as opposed to Line-breeding; start out with a buck that is totally unrelated to any of your does, and then work from there. Eventually you can't help but Line-breed because no one that I know can afford to buy a new buck every year. The most important thing is to start with good stock and keep more than one buck so you are not forced to keep breeding the same buck to all your does every year.

How to choose a buck to breed your does to:

It's really just common sense. Don't use a buck solely because he has a penis. Always try to "breed up". Look for a buck where he, and

his family, look better in body and udder than your own does and also look at temperament. Never use a buck that you know nothing about (if you can help it). You should decide what you want to see in your kids, and look for this in the buck you are considering and his family.

Look at the buck. Does he have the conformation (body style and shape) you desire in your kids? If a buck has bad conformation (body style and shape), he isn't going to produce kids with good conformation. Is he strong and healthy?

Look at the buck's family. Look at the buck's MOTHER. What is her udder like? You want the very best attachments (the udder is held up high to the body and not saggy and hanging low). If the mother has a crappy udder, her son is not going to "throw" (give to his kids) good ones. Look at the buck's father's mother (if possible). Does she have a good udder and body? If the buck has a sister, she would be a good one to look at. How is her udder and body? Of course if the buck has other kids, you can look at them.

Things you want in a dairy goat:

- Good conformation - that means good body style and shape.
- **Good udder** - Udders need to have good "attachments", that mean how the udder attaches to the body. The udder should be held up high and tight to the body and not hang down and sag. A sagging udder will not get any better and will only get worse. You do not want a sagging udder because an udder that hangs low will not hold up to many years of milking, will be difficult to milk because it hangs lower than the milk pail, and most importantly, risks damage (I have seen a low hanging udder get ripped open from getting caught on a protruding object, leading to the need for a total mastectomy)
- Teat & orifice size - If you are going to be hand milking, you want teats that are big enough to comfortably milk. Also, the "orifice" (hole the milk comes out of) is important. If the hole is tiny, it will take forever to milk the doe. I have not found orifice size to be genetic, but teat size is.
- **Color** - Many people who show do not really care about color, to them conformation and udders are the most important, but let's be honest, pretty coloring is always nice. If you are wanting to sell your extra wethers as pets, coloring is important because people buying goats as just pets want pretty as well as friendly.
- **Temperament** - We breed for good temperament and friendly goats. Of course this trait is environmental as well as genetic: it's how the goat is raised as well as breeding.
- Strength, health and hardiness - It doesn't hurt to look for these traits.

Examples:

- Ovaltinaweena - has very good conformation and a great udder. She would make a great show goat as well as a great home milk goat.
- Max - has a great udder, pretty good conformation, a nice full body. Her teats are a nice size for hand milking. Her legs are a tab bit short. You would not want to breed her to a buck with short legs. She's an excellent example of what you'd want in a home milk goat.
- Goldie - Our herd matriarch. Has pretty good conformation. Nice udder. She is strong with nice distance between her front legs. If you were into showing goats, Goldie could use just a bit more "refinement" (just a little more femininity). When bred to Uly, who throws nice "refinement", you get great kids. She also has a wonderful temperament which she passes to her kids. She was a good choice as a herd matriarch.

A doe's heat cycle is approximately every 18-21 days.

Signs of heat: (A doe may exhibit any, all, or none of these signs)

- "Flagging" (wagging) her tail.
- Mounting other does.
- Letting other does mount her.
- Fighting

- Letting herself get beat up without defending herself.
- Having a "crush" on another doe.
- No interest in feed.
- Swollen and/or pink rear end.
- Mucous discharge from her vagina
- Her side tail hair is wet and/or clumped together.
- Yelling for no reason.

How long does a heat last?

Anywhere for 6 hours to 3 days depending on the doe.

How can I tell if my goat is pregnant?

The normal gestation time is 145-155 days. Some breeds tend to kid on the early side and some on the late side. Count 150 days from when the doe was bred and prepare for kids at least week before. (Our herd actually averages 6 days early, which means we are prepared for our does kidding at day 142)

What if I don't know the breeding date?

There is really no way you can tell a goat is pregnant from just looking at her. If a doe does not come back into heat after she is bred, she may be pregnant (note I say may). Most goats are seasonal (see above), so your doe should come into heat every 18-21 days from Sept. through Dec. There is really no sure way to know if your doe is pregnant without ultra-sounding her.

A goat can look pregnant and not be. Healthy goats are naturally "wide". This is their rumen, which makes them wide and is a sign of good health. Many people mistake a healthy goat, with a well developed rumen, for being pregnant. I have had people ask me, "This is a nice goat, when is she due to have her babies", and I answer, "She had them 3 weeks ago" <smile>.

A goat may not start "showing" until at least a month or less before kidding, and sometimes they never show at all. This is why I stress to people to know the date that their does were bred. That is the only real way to know when she may kid.

A doe, who has never kidded before may usually start "making her udder" (developing an udder) 4-6 weeks before kidding (note I say may- we have had doe weight until a couple days before she kidding to even start making their udder and it didn't really fill out until hours before she kidded). A doe that has kidded before may start "bagging up" (filling her udder with milk in preparation to feed her kids) a week before kidding but she may even wait until the day she kids.

Since there is really no way to be certain when a doe will kid without knowing the due date, does should NEVER be housed with bucks. If you "run" does and bucks together, you will never know when to expect kids, you won't be able to prepare for the kids, and you will risk losing them.

How we handle breeding here at Fias Co Farm:

Our goats go on "dates". Our bucks are trained to walk on a leash. When the doe goes into heat, the chosen buck for that particular doe is walked down to the doe barn and the buck and doe are put together in a stall for about an hour. We make sure to see them "do it" three times. A "good one" is when the doe arches her back after the buck thrusts. Once you see it you will know what I mean.

After three pokes and/or one hour, we walk the buck back up to the buck area. By then he is happy to go home and be with his buck buddies.

We make a note of the date of the breeding and if the doe does not come back into heat in 18-21 days, we know she was bred and we know the approximate date that she will kid.

We keep 21 does, but we may or may not breed them all each year, it depends on their growth and how their heats fall in with our breeding program. We only breed 3 does in each "batch". We take a two week break between each batch before breeding starts again (or course, heats don't always fall in with this perfectly). We do this because we want to be able to give each doe her own kidding stall for two weeks and we also want to be able to spend one-on-one time with the kids (so they will grow up friendly and loving to humans). If we were to breed all our does at once, kidding season would be a madhouse/three ring circus, with no room in the barn and there would be no way we could spend time each day with every kid. The way we handle our breeding, makes kidding season controlled and very enjoyable for everybody (humans, does and kids).

Infertility, Free Will, Gender Confusion, and "Gay Goats"

Just because you decide you want to breed a doe to a buck does not necessarily mean that the doe or buck wish to have sex with each other. Remember, you are dealing with living, thinking, emotional creatures that do have free will. Whereas bucks and does are driven by instinct when they go into heat (in does) and rut (bucks), there are other influences that may cause them to not want to have sex with a particular goat.

First, let me say it is possible for does, just like humans to be infertile. And just like in humans, this may or may not be treatable.

Example of infertility for no known reason:

We had a doe, Ruby, who was friendly, beautiful, extremely healthy, and never sick a day in her life. She loved to have sex but never conceived. She liked boys very much and was quite popular with them in the Fall. She liked going on "dates" and had many boyfriends over five years time. She even lived with a very fertile enthusiastic buck for three months during breeding season when she was 5 years old. If she didn't conceive then, she was never going to. She now lives in a new loving home as a "wether". She was sold with the full understanding that she was infertile. Luckily for Ruby she was very friendly and very beautiful, so she makes a great pet. There was nothing we could ever figure that was wrong with Ruby other than the fact that she was just infertile. We would have loved to have had kids out of her, but it was just not meant to be. That's life with livestock.

Example of infertility and gender confusion with a possible cause:

I had a friend who had a doe that was not breed her first year and then when she was two she "bagged up". She had a huge, beautiful udder but it was not filled with "real" milk... it was very watery. She obviously had a hormonal "issue" of some sort. This doe was very "buckish" and acted like a buck toward other does who went into heat. She was jokingly called the "Lesbian Goat". Actually she was more "Bi": she liked girls, but also liked guys. When she went into heat and was bred by bucks, she never conceived. She actually acted so bucky, that she lived with the other boys where she dominated them. She was quite happy living with boys and though she always had the big udder and went into heat, she never conceived. After a few years, it ended up that she had a large tumor in her vagina. It was not cancer, just a reoccurring tumor. This may have been what was effecting her hormones, thus causing her to act bucky and "bag up" and physically blocked her reproductive system, and kept her from getting bred.

Example of Sexuality Confusion:

Perry was a buck we had that always liked people (I mean *really* liked people) and was reluctant to breed does.

Note, that is is normal for a ratty buck to be "interested" in pretty much anything alive, and they will attempt to have sex with other bucks, wethers, you, etc, but they will always stop what they are doing to breed a female goat.

When we first picked him up he acted a bit buckish toward Larry (flapping his tongue and wagging his foot). We thought it was cute and funny. Little did we know that this was a sign of things to come (or should I say not to come) many years down the line. We have no idea how Perry was raised his first two months of life, and whether this effected his behavior, or whether he was just born that way (either is possible). We do know he was bottle raised by a boy and maybe he got his "mother figure" a bit mixed up.

His first year he was uninterested the first time he was introduced to a doe in heat, but later in the season he did breed some does. He was always just a bit aggressive and would get frustrated and a bit angry with the does.

We got some very nice kids from Perry for a few years, but the interesting thing was, that if you put him in a stall with a doe in raging heat, and he could see Larry, he would just look at Larry. He loved Larry more than girl goats. Larry would have to get out of sight, and then Perry would breed the doe, but with not a lot of enthusiasm.

Eventually Perry got to the point he did not want to breed does at all. He still loved people and would flap his tongue at any human (especially Larry), but when put in a stall with a doe in heat he was totally uninterested. The last year we owned Perry he did not breed a single doe. He was quite healthy; he was just not interested in girl goats. He had free will and he liked humans and not goats. We knew he was fertile, since he did give us some kids (very nice kids I might add) but his interest in does waned. There is really no way to force a buck to have sex if he doesn't want to, and we were not going to try. Perry eventually was given to a new loving home with the understanding that he liked humans and had no interest in breeding does.

Perry was not only a "Gay Goat", in that he liked males better than females, he was "Trans-Species" in that he like male humans better than goats of any sex. That was just Perry and we accepted him for himself. He was a great guy and we loved him no matter what his sexual orientation.

These are examples that show that goats are not just breeding machines, and that different things can effect whether or not they will breed, whether it be for physical or mental reasons. Sometimes you have a goat that is infertile; there may or may not be a physical reason for this that you can treat. Sometimes you might have a doe that does not want to breed a certain buck, it is her free will to choose. Sometimes you might just have a "Gay Goat", and in this case we just accept him for what he or she is.

