

Goat Management Tips

<http://www.goldenbrookfarm.com/management-tips.htm>

GOATS ARE GREAT!

I think they are the friendliest of livestock and really enjoy being with "their" humans but there are a few bits of advice I give to all new potential goat owners:

1. Check the zoning laws in your town. Some residential areas will not allow goats.
2. Goats are livestock and live in barns. You can love them as much as you want, BUT they do not belong in your house. If you bring them in when they are small, they will either be obnoxious screaming from the barn for you or will take out more screen doors than you can imagine!
3. Goats require you to provide them with food & water at least **TWICE A DAY** at approximately the same time and like to have a schedule. Change stresses them.
4. Goats require regular preventative care just like any other domesticated animal: annual vaccinations, deworming, hoof care & more. Know financially what you are getting into, what you can do yourself and what you will need to pay a vet for. Find a vet in your area, both a regular vet & an emergency 24 hour vet who can assist you should something go wrong.
5. Goats require **STRONG, SECURE** fencing. They can easily climb, break or destroy fences if you do not put them up securely and use fences adequate to contain your goats AND to keep dogs and coyotes out. (contact your local fish & game department to find out what predators live in your area) AND **NO**, you cannot leave them loose, they will not just stay in your yard.
6. Buy a book and learn about what they require and if they would fit into your lifestyle. Never buy an animal you have no knowledge of how to care for. Also this will enable you to ask specific questions to the breeder if you should have some.

Do ALL OF THIS BEFORE going to see some cute goat kids! Once you see the kids, you will buy them. Even the hardest non-animal lover I have ever met (usually the husband-sorry guys) is smiling and laughing when the kids pop up and down like popcorn on their rocks and toys and can't resist. Please also remember that they do grow up and won't be babies forever. If you are not interested in milking, you can teach them to be pack animals, just teach them to lead and go on walks, teach them to pull carts...

What is Normal for a goat?

TEMPERATURE: 102-104 degrees

PULSE: 70-80 per minute

RESPIRATION: 15 to 30 per minute depending on the weather and how fast they ran to the grain bucket!

RUMEN MOVEMENTS: should always be moving and you should hear movement 1-2 per minute

PUBERTY: Does shouldn't bred until they reach 75% of their adult size, or so when they kid, they will be at least 12 months but more ideally 18 months old. Bucks can breed at 3 months, so separate early enough!

GROWTH: Dairy Goats mature to their full size in 2-3 years. Height first, then depth & width

DOE'S HEAT CYCLE: every 16-20 Days with standing heat when a doe will accept the buck lasting up to 24 hours

GESTATION (PREGNANCY): 145-154 DAYS

LIFE SPAN: Does that are kidding/milking yearly 8-10 years, Pet or "retired" dairy does 10-16+ years, bucks & wethers (castrated males) 8-10+ years

BASIC GOAT REQUIREMENTS:

Please remember these are very general guidelines. I recommend all goat owners purchase a few goat books for reference and consult with their veterinarian for more in-depth health care information. The information presented here is only to be used as a guide and not intended to prescribe any treatment for your goats.



HOUSING

Miniature goats require about 10 square feet of indoor space per animal. I would plan on at least twice the amount you need for your "original" goats, since goats tend to multiply, either by breeding or goat owners who want more! The house should be dry, well ventilated and provide protection from rain, snow & wind. You can easily convert a shed, section off part of your existing barn, use a calf hutch or even buy a large dog house for them. Wood or "dirt" floors don't drain well. For a good floor surface that will drain, stay dry and be easy to clean: remove all of the top soil from the area, fill with about a foot of gravel and then top with 6" stone dust. Wet the stone dust and pack it level. Set your house on top. Make

sure your goat house or barn will be easy for you to clean. The easier to clean, the more likely that you will do it often! Facing the house towards the south to southeast is best. Do not face the doorway to the north. The wind will blow right into the house in winter. I also like a house with a patio where the goats can hang out when it is raining or snowing. Goats will not go out in the rain! Having a patio area with a hayrack will keep your hay dry and provide a place for them outside of their house on rainy days.

STALL BEDDING

I have to say that I am meticulous when it comes to stall cleaning. My husband would tell you that I clean the barn more than the house - he's so silly! Overall, the cleaner the environment your animals are in, the healthier they will be. I sometimes see goats kept in stalls with no bedding, just a build up of manure on the floor, or in what appear to be very dirty stalls. Although they'll survive, contact with bacteria from the manure is bound to impact their overall health and well-being over time. My advice would be to keep your stalls as clean as you can, make sure everyone has adequate space by not crowding animals, and plan your cleaning schedule on a chart so you will be more likely to stick with it. I bed the house with shavings SPRING, SUMMER & FALL. I also use Sweet PDZ stall deodorizer regularly to keep the stalls smelling fresh. "Fluff" the bedding daily or several times a week with a manure fork or rake and sprinkle new bedding on top as necessary. Completely clean out the house weekly, at a minimum of once per month. More often when they spend a lot of time indoors, mainly if there has been rainy or inclement weather. Also your doe kidding stalls and new kid pens must be kept especially clean to keep everyone healthy.

In WINTER, I use a bed pack method. I start with a completely cleaned out stall and sprinkle the floor with a generous coating of Sweet PDZ (stall deodorizer), then I layer on about 4" of pine shavings. Over the shavings, I spread 1-2" of straw. Every day I remove whatever manure I can and rake the top layer so any remaining goat manure falls below the surface. I then sprinkle a bit of shavings and fresh straw on the top layer. The idea is to keep the top clean and dry and let the bedding below compost and create heat. The trick is to keep the bed pack dry which you do by consistently adding enough bedding to absorb any moisture. If we get a damp or rainy spell during the winter, I spread a layer of diatomaceous earth on the bed pack to keep lice under control (you can dust the goats too along their topline at the same time, just try not to create a lot of dust since diatomaceous earth isn't good to breathe) and spread more shavings to absorb everything. By the end of winter I have a good foot or so of bedding to dig out and spread in my garden! The stall needs to be cleaned out completely by the first warm, wet spell in early spring, otherwise lice can become a real problem.

Housing the Does & Kids: OUR MAIN BARN is 22' X 34'

View coming down the hill in the kid pen. We use this pen for all our does and their kids once they are 2-3 weeks old during the day and to house our young kids after weaning day & night the first year. The stall is 6' X 5'. We close the sliding door at night. The window you see on this is in the milk room.

This is a view from the main doe herd side. The inside "day" stall is 6' X 7'. At night, we open up the aisle section (an additional 6' X 6' area) so everyone has room. In the winter we open the stall on the other side of the aisle and the herd has another 8' X 10', so everyone has a nice, cozy spot (below). We also use this stall during kidding season to separate the does from their kids at night.



One week after our does kid, they are moved out of their private kidding stall to our community doe & kid stall. They are kept in groups according to age so does & kids can socialize. We usually pair 2-3 does together depending on how well they get along with each other. At two weeks the kids are separated at night so we can milk. This picture shows access to the stall as well as a fenced in area with 4" X 4" panels so no one can escape and nothing can get in.

Housing the Big Boys: BUCK HOUSING

The top buck house was the first one we made. I like the patio area in the front as the goats can hang out there when it's

raining, but this house is hard to clean and quite back breaking! I wouldn't make such a "low" house again that I couldn't walk into. I use it now for a separation pen or for my oldest buck Merlin rut so the young bucks aren't so hard on him.

FENCING & PENS

Miniature goats require a minimum of 130 square feet of outdoor space. Fencing must be strong, high and escape proof. Goats are great at finding gaps in fencing! The best I found are called Combo or Stock panels. They are 16' long and 52" high. The line wires are spaced closer at the bottom and gradually increase upward. The goats can climb all over them and they don't bend. An 8-week old goat can walk right through them though so you should line the panels with hex net wire to keep baby goats from going through. There are also 20' long panels available that have 4" X4" squares which cost more, but will contain even kid goats. These panels can be connected at the corners with wire cable ties and supported with a few t-posts. The fence also needs to be high enough so a stray dog or coyote cannot jump the fence and also when the goats are adults they cannot jump out.



Please never tie your goats out on a rope. They easily become entangled and can strangle themselves. They love to go for walks and browse around trees though! They love to go for walks & browse though. Mine have been in parades!

OK so your goats don't need a tree to climb but I love this picture because it reminds everyone how agile and sure-footed goats are. Your pen should contain some type of safe climbing toy: a big rock, a cable spool (with the holes covered), a wooden box or an old picnic table (make sure the paint is non-toxic). Goats need to climb!

FOOD & WATER

Grain, Hay, Water, Minerals, Baking Soda

Grain-Always use a feed intended for goats. Sheep feeds do not contain copper and goats need copper! Grain should be fed sparingly to goats who are not milking, in their last month of gestation or growing. Goats utilize their feed very efficiently and grain is a concentrate so it will seem as if you are feeding them very little, however it is important to not overfeed grain for several health reasons...

For wethers (castrated males) add a pinch of Ammonium Chloride daily or feed them a meat goat pellet or mineral mix that contain ammonium chloride. It is VERY important to add this to help prevent urine calculi. This condition is very painful and costly to treat, so preventing it is essential. Other preventative measures include making sure your goat drinks enough water (have clean, fresh water available at all times), avoid alfalfa hay (too much calcium for wethers) and do not overfeed grain (if fed at all).

Hay-The bulk of their food intake should be a nice clean, leafy hay. Offer them fresh hay often and feed enough so they are munching hay for at least 20 minutes twice a day. Our pregnant does, young kids and lactating does get all the hay they want free choice. The hay should be dust-free, free from mold and be fine in texture and as leafy as possible. 2nd cut is the best as it is the most nutritious. Of course, many times only coarser hay will be available which is fine, they will just waste more of it. Remove any hay that becomes wet and completely clean out hay manger and rake under it once per week. Look for 2nd cut grass hay during the summer. If you find some hay they like, stock up!

We use a 10' X 20' canopy to feed hay to three pens at once, our main doe pen, our kid pen and one of our buck pens. I can fill all three racks from the one center area in the kid pen which cuts down on chore time.

Water-Keep fresh, clean water available at all times. You will find your goats will drink small amounts of water, unless they are lactating. I like to put two buckets in each pen in different areas. Sometimes the goats will knock over a bucket while playing or poop in it and this way they still have another bucket. Forget using a large open tank. Chances are the goats will foul it and you will constantly be dumping out the water and wasting it. I prefer to use several 5 gallon flatback pails in my main goat pen and two smaller 8 quart pails in my other pens.

In the winter I bring my goats warm water twice a day depending on the temperature outdoors. In winter, goats will drink more if the water is warm. Be careful that the water is not too hot-you don't want to burn them! If you use a heated bucket make sure the cord is inaccessible to nibbling goats! A bucket inside their house nestled in the straw will take longer to freeze too. I also like the older style plastic coolers. They keep the water cool in summer and unfrozen longer in winter.

Minerals-Loose minerals offered in an appropriate mineral feeder are best. Choose the one for the type of hay you are feeding. I use Blue Seal Min-A-Mix fed free choice (don't confuse it with Min-A-Vite which I like, but it is a mineral AND conditioning supplement so you should not leave it out free choice. You need to measure what you feed). Manna Pro also makes a mineral which contains ammonium chloride to help prevent urinary calculi which makes it a good choice for wethers.

Baking Soda-it's a good idea to keep a small can of baking soda available to your goats. When a goat's stomach becomes too acidic they instinctually consume an alkaline substance like baking soda to restore the balance and keep from becoming sick. Baking soda does not taste good and they won't consume alot.