

Contents >>>

Housing (Fencing, Shelter, Toys)

Feeding (Bottle-Feeding, Grain, Forages, Minerals)

Health (Vaccination, Hoof Trimming, Disbudding, Castration, Detecting Illness)

Socialization & Companionship



A Goat-Owner's Complete Guide to

Kid Care



Housing >>>

Building a Goat-Proof Fence

Goats are notorious escape artists. As the old saying goes: "If it won't hold water, it won't hold a goat". The best types of fencing for goats are utility panels, woven field fencing, or closely spaced strands of electric wire. If you elect to use utility panels or woven field fencing, you will probably still need to run a strand of electric wire around the top, to keep the goats from climbing over. A word of caution: goats (especially those with horns) may get their heads stuck if the squares of the fence are too large. 4" squares are ideal. Electric fencing can be powered by either a solar or a plug-in unit. Follow the installation instructions for your unit, paying particular attention to how to properly ground the system.



Congratulations

on the purchase of your new kid(s)!

Whether this is your first goat or your hundredth, we hope that this guide will be helpful to you. Disclaimer: The contents of this guide are for informational purposes only, and are not a substitute for professional veterinary advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of a veterinarian with any questions you may have regarding the medical condition of your animal.

Shelter

Your goat will need some form of shelter, either a shed or a stall in a barn. This shelter doesn't need to be elaborate, it just needs to give your goat a place to get out of the rain and wind. One of the most important considerations when building a livestock shelter is ventilation. Good ventilation is a crucial part of preventing respiratory illness. A common misconception is that goats will need heat lamps or some other heat source to get through the winter. This is not the case. Heat lamps present a huge fire hazard in barns, especially if they are close to dry hay, wood shavings, or cobwebs. Deep bedding is the best way to keep your goats warm during winter. Use enough wood shavings or straw to cover your goat's knees when he/she is laying down.

Toys

Providing toys and climbing structures in your goat's enclosure will help to keep them entertained. Goats are incredibly agile, and will make a game out of hopping on and off of just about anything. Large rocks make some of the best climbing structures. They also serve a dual purpose, by naturally wearing down your goat's hooves, reducing the frequency with which they will need to be trimmed. So many items can be repurposed as goat toys, for example, old tractor tires and cable spools. You could also build your own ramps and platforms. Be creative, and have fun!

Feeding >>>

Bottle-Feeding

For at least the first 8 weeks of his/her life, your goat will need to be bottle-fed. You can find a bottle made especially for goat kids at your local feed store, although regular baby bottles seem to work just as well. It is important to thoroughly wash the bottle and nipple after each use. You may choose to feed either whole milk, or a milk replacer powder. Milk should be warmed to roughly 104 degrees, comfortably warm, but not scalding hot. Remember, it is always better to leave your kid wanting more than to overfeed him/her.

Frequency

For the first 3 days of his/her life, your goat has been fed every 2-4 hours. You can start to space these feedings out, working toward feeding 3 oz 4 times per day. The amount

and frequency of feedings will constantly be changing as your goat grows. To help you figure this out, there is a chart available at goatspots.com/articles/bottle-feeding/.

Weaning

Once your goat is at least 8 weeks old, you can start to wean them off of milk. Gradually reduce the amount of milk you feed over a 1-2 week period.

Water

Your goat needs to have access to clean water at all times. Water buckets and troughs need to be checked regularly for contamination, as dead rodents can poison the animal's water supply. During the winter, you will either need to refill your goat's waterer several times a day, or invest in a heated water bucket or tank de-icer.



Grain

Kids should be introduced to grain and greens when they are 10 days old. You will be surprised by how quickly they learn to eat them. For young goats, we recommend a grain with 16% protein that contains a coccidiostat (look for a label containing the words "medicated" or "Decoquate"). The coccidiostat will help to inhibit the growth and reproduction of coccidia, an internal parasite that is the leading cause of diarrhea in goats aged 3 weeks to 5 months. After your goat has grown to a healthy weight, you will need to restrict their intake of grain to prevent obesity and other diseases.



Forages

Forages will constitute the majority of your goat's diet (after they are weaned off of milk). Goats are ruminant animals and need to eat throughout the day in order to keep their digestive systems working properly. Pasture and dry hay are the most common types of forage utilized by goat owners. Pelleted alfalfa and timothy can also be incorporated into your goat's diet, but should not be overfed. Goats prefer tall grasses and shrubs to short grass. This preference helps them avoid picking up intestinal parasites that reproduce in their feces. Goats are excellent at removing brush and invasive weeds. Ours really seem to enjoy eating the growth along the edge of the woods.

Minerals >>>

Absolutely essential to your goat's well-being!

Depending on where you live, mineral deficiency may pose a challenge to your goat's health. In our area (Northern New York), the soil is lacking in both copper and selenium, which means that the grass and hay that we feed are lacking in these critical minerals as well. Our water is also rich in iron, which inhibits the absorption of copper, causing secondary copper deficiency. (Sulfur, molybdenum, lead, manganese, and cadmium are also copper antagonists.)

All goats should be provided with a high quality loose mineral (we use Sweetlix Meat Maker 16:8). Goats should also be provided with baking soda in a separate container, to help stabilize the pH of their rumens between feedings. If you live in a particularly copper deficient area, you may also need to give copper boluses (pills) a few times a year. To provide the selenium that our goats need, we give them a monthly dose of a selenium & vitamin E oral paste. If you find this to be too

much of a hassle, you can talk to your veterinarian about switching to a selenium injection that can be administered once annually.



Health

There are a few things that you will need to do for your new goat right away to ensure that he/she has a long, healthy life. Goats also require some routine maintenance to keep them feeling their best. (Deworming is not discussed in this guide because current recommendations advise that chemical dewormers be given only on an as-needed basis, to slow the spread of antiparasitic resistance. For more information, research FAMACHA scoring.)



recommend Oklahoma State University's "How to Trim Goat Hooves"). You can also ask another goat owner to show you, or you can hire someone to trim for you.

Vaccination

Kids receive antibodies in their first few hours of life from their mothers' colostrum, which protects them while their young immune systems are developing. However, as they get older, these maternal antibodies start to wear off, leaving kids susceptible to illness if they are not vaccinated. All kids should receive a CDT vaccine (clostridium perfringens types C and D and tetanus) when they are about 30 days old, with a booster 3 to 4 weeks later, and then once annually thereafter. We also recommend a recently developed vaccine to prevent the highly contagious disease caseous lymphadenitis. This can be administered at 3 months of age, repeated 2 weeks later, and then boosted annually.

Hoof Trimming

Hoof trimming is an essential part of keeping your goat happy and healthy. Most goats will need to have their hooves trimmed a minimum of 4 times per year, but each animal's feet will grow and wear differently. Fortunately, it is a simple task that you can easily learn to do yourself. Shears are inexpensive (around \$20), and can be found at any feed store. Many people have learned how to trim hooves by watching videos on YouTube (we

Disbudding >>>

Q: *Do I need to have my kid disbudded?*

A: *That depends!*

You may choose to disbud or not to disbud your kid. Horns can become caught in fencing and collars, and may cause injury to other goats or humans. However, many people raise horned goats without any problems, provided they take the right safety measures. Should you choose to disbud your kid, this will need to be done within the first few weeks of their life, before the horns really start to grow. In our experience, dehorning paste is not nearly as effective as cauterizing the horn buds. A veterinarian will be able to administer lidocaine so that the kid will not feel any pain during the procedure, and can prescribe medication to help manage the pain in the days following.



Castration

If you have a male kid, you will probably want to have him castrated. Uncastrated males (bucks) tend to be aggressive and have a very high sex drive compared to castrated males (wethers). As with disbudding, the earlier this procedure is performed, the better. Bucklings can reach sexual maturity at just 4 months of age, and younger animals tend to recuperate more quickly.

Detecting Illness

Always be monitoring your goats for signs of illness or injury. Some indications that your goat is not feeling well include:

- Weakness (droopy ears)
- Limping/staggering
- Lack of normal appetite
- Loose feces
- Pressing head against the wall/fence
- Coughing
- Runny nose
- Dull-looking eyes
- Straining to urinate
- Swollen midsection
- Isolating himself/herself from the rest of the herd



Companionship & Socialization

Goats are herd animals, and require the company of another goat or group of goats to keep them happy and entertained. Goats may fight to establish and maintain a hierarchy within their social group; this is completely normal behavior and is no cause for alarm. Your goat also needs to learn how you fit into their life structure, so it is important that you make a daily effort to interact with your goat. You will want to introduce them to concepts such as picking up their feet and standing on a milking table early on.

Enjoy your goat(s)!

There are so many ways to have fun with your new goat (even after they have grown out of their cute baby phase). If you like to hike, consider bringing your goat along with you as a pack animal. There are even special backpacks made just for goats! Goats can also be trained under harness and can pull carts just as well as a miniature horse. If you are interested in competing with your goats, look into the registration and health certification requirements for entry into your nearest county fair. Joining a goat club or registry is another great way

to meet fellow goat owners, while gaining access to a whole circuit of more competitive shows. If you have a female goat, you may choose to milk her when she is of age and you may enjoy processing the milk into butter, yogurt, frozen yogurt, different cheeses, soaps, lotion, etc. Goats are such versatile animals, with such fun personalities. You may even find yourself enjoying your goats so much that you want to build a business around them, which is what happened to us!

Hopefully this guide has been helpful to you in getting your kid off to a good start in a long and healthy life! We're by no means experts, but if you have any questions about anything goat related, please feel free to email us at cook.enterprises.ny@gmail.com, and we will do our best to help you find an answer.



Helpful Resources >>>

Cornell Cooperative Extension

NYS 4-H Youth Development and agricultural programs and information
<http://cce.cornell.edu/>

Maryland Small Ruminant Page

Sheep/goat related research, webinars, and blogs managed by University of Maryland Extension's sheep & goat expert
<http://sheepandgoat.com/>

ADGA Knowledgebase

Collection of articles from the American Dairy Goat Association
<http://adga.org/knowledgebase/>