



KEEPING GOATS QUICK START GUIDE

Introduction



Goats are one of the oldest species of domesticated animals. There are nine species generally accepted as true goats with around three hundred breeds. Many small farmers or backyard raisers have found that they can earn from raising goats. Goats provide milk, meat, fiber, and hide which raisers can sell or use for themselves. If you are willing enough to try raising goats, you can start by raising one to two goats. Goat-raising is not easy but if you also willing to learn more about them, you can confidently raise goats either as pets or as livestock. This quick-start guide will give you basic information about goats and goat-raising.

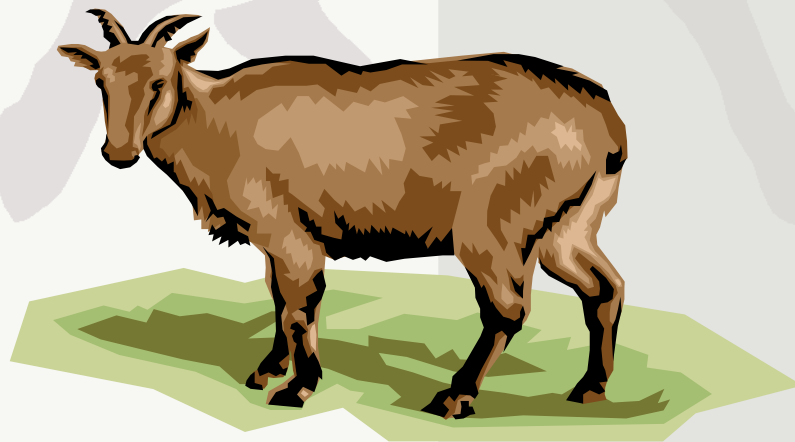
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Part I – The Goat





I. What You Need To Know About Goats

Goats are herbivores. They fall under the genus *Capra*. What we know as the domestic goat is a subspecies of the family Bovidae. Goats are closely related to the sheep so that both animals will often exhibit similar traits. If you are serious about raising goats, you should start to memorize terms related to this venture. A female goat is called a “nanny” or “doe” and a young female is called a “doeling”. A mother goat is referred to as a dam. A male goat is called a “buck” or “billy” and those that have been castrated are “wethers”. A goat offspring is called a “kid”. In Middle Eastern and Asian countries, goats are kept for agricultural purposes or sometimes as pets. In the US, goat-raising is finding its way to become a fast growing industry.

A Short Goat History

The oldest goat fossils and evidence of goat domestication were found in Ganj-e Dareh, a Neolithic settlement located in Iranian Kurdistan dating back to thousands of years ago. Other places that also showed early signs of goat domestication include Euphrates River Valley in Turkey, Zagros Mountains in Iran, and Indus Basin in Pakistan. Archaeologists say that goat fossils found in these locations most probably belonged to domesticated goats since it is very unlikely that wild goats would have survived there on their own. In addition, the goat fossils had size and body shape different from wild goats.

Evidence of goat domestication show that they have been used as milk and meat sources as far back as 10,000 to 11,000 years ago during the Neolithic Age. Their dung was used as fuel and their hair, bones and sinew were utilized as clothing, and also as tools and materials for building. Goat hide served as water and wine bottles, and parchment. Goats were also used as currency in the barter system before the invention of coins.

The Domestic Goat The ancestors of the modern domestic goat came from Asia and Eastern Europe. Goats are sociable animals which made them easy to domesticate. They move in herds so they are easy to look after. A goatherd tends the goat herd which usually has five to twenty five heads. Goats communicate to each other by sight, smell or hearing. They have enough intelligence to make the obey orders from the goatherd.

You can easily observe the social structure followed by goats in their herd. Usually, there are two goats in the head. These are the head doe and the head buck. The leader is determined by means of duels. The rival goats butt their heads until one surrenders and the winner becomes the leader. Goats are naturally curious and intelligent. They are known to be highly alert animals that can quickly assess the danger in a situation, and react accordingly. They can jump up high places up to five feet.

There are about two hundred breeds of goat known to exist today. They fall into different categories based on their use or products they provide such as dairy, meat, fiber and skin. Some goats are bred to become companion animals.

Basic Goat Facts

Goats have 24 molars in the back of their mouths both on the top and the bottom. Kids have 8 incisors in the lower front jaw. You can usually tell a goat's age by their teeth. Their stomach has four chambers which allow the goat to digest almost anything they feed on. Both bucks and nannies can grow beards. They generally dislike baths. Goats are ruminants which mean they chew their food, soften it in their first

stomach, regurgitate it and chew the food again. Goats make bleating sounds which they use to express different moods.

Goats enter puberty at around seven to ten months of age. A buck's breeding age starts at around eight to ten months while a doe's at around one year. A female goat can have a maximum of 6 kids in one pregnancy. The gestation period is about 145 to 155 days. Their average life span is from eight to twelve years.

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II. Owning Your First Goat

Being ready to own your first goat is important. Preparing yourself requires work but it is necessary in order to become successful. You need to check existing laws in your locality about keeping animals as pets. Since goats are not considered as traditional pets and have to be raised in farms, you have to review those laws and make inquiries if you will be allowed to keep them as pets. If you are going to keep your goat in your backyard, you would need to install a goat pen or fences even before you buy your first goat. You will also have to provide a clean, well-ventilated goat shelter. If you have a farm where you can raise your goats, you will have an easier time because they are farm animals anyway. They will have enough open areas for grazing.

In addition, you also have to make sure that you will be able to take care of their needs. Your schedule must permit you time to look after them or if not you personally, someone who has time and will to do it. You need to check your goats at least two times a day, making sure they are well fed and have enough water always.

Pets or Livestock

As we have mentioned, goats are not traditionally kept as pets but there is a growing number of people who keep goats as pets. If you plan to get a goat for a pet, you have to be sure that you can provide for their primary needs as well as medical attention and, adequate grounds for

grazing or browsing. You should have them vaccinated, dehorned, and have their hooves properly trimmed. You can train certainly train them but it will take a lot of patience to do so. People call a trained goat “halter broke”.

Pygmy goats are usually kept as pets because they are alert, highly responsive and good natured. They are also able to adapt easily to varying climatic conditions. Many goat lovers prefer cashmere goats to keep as pets because of similar characteristics.

If you plan to keep goats as farm animals or livestock, you will have a wider selection of goat breed to choose from. The requirements are similar to keeping them as pets but in a larger scale and needs more dedication on your part.

Goat Breeds

Goat breeds are classified according to their main use. To determine your choice, you need to know your reasons why you want to keep goats.

- a. **The Meat Goat** – Goat meat has lower fat content than lamb or beef. Because of this, raising goats for their meat is becoming very popular in the United States. Meat goats are bred to grow faster and relatively easier than other types. The most popular is the Boer goat.
- b. **The Dairy Goat** – In some areas, goat milk is better than cow milk. Goat milk is digested easily and has lower lactose content. Dairy goats are easier to tend than dairy cows since they can easily adapt to any environments. The 6 most common types of dairy goats include the Alpines, Nubians, Togenburgs, LaManchas, and the Saanens.
- c. **The Cashmere Goat** – A cashmere goat is any breed that produces cashmere wool, which is the goat's fine, soft inner coat hair. It is a fast growing business in the United States. It started in 1990 when Cashmere goats were initially imported from Australia and New.

Getting the Right Goat for You

The right goat for you depends on your reasons for raising goats. The breed will depend on which of the breeds of a particular goat type is the best. This can be very difficult to do actually because there are many breeds to choose from for each type of goat. You are most probably not an animal specialist who can identify the particular goat that is best suited to you. One option open to you is to consult veterinarians or friends who have experiences in raising goats.

Once you have chosen the goat you want, the next step is to find the possible locations where you can obtain the goat. After finding the place, you have to assess the goats you find there before buying, basing your decision on the standards that the type of goat you want must have. The right goat for you among those that are there is the healthy one.

Another consideration for selecting the right goat is how much available space you have for your goat. A goat you intend to keep as a pet and raise in your backyard must be one of the smaller goat breeds. Goats for dairy production need a large enough space where you can build a milk shed. Large sized goats need a corresponding large area as well.

It is quite important that you know how to determine a goat's age. What you don't want is to get a very old goat that may die sooner than you think. You can do this by looking at the goat's set of teeth. Kids are born with 8 baby teeth. Goat raisers call a one year old goat a "two-tooth" because the two baby teeth at the center front have been replaced by two permanent teeth. A two year old goat is called a "four-tooth" for the same reason. The same principle is applied for the next two years. After four years, it is more difficult to tell the goat's age.

How to Choose a Dairy Goat and a Meat Goat

A good nanny or doe must be angular, possessing prominent hip bones. Its body must be long, its thighs thin, with two straight, and wide apart

front legs. Its back legs must have ample distance in between at the hocks. The escutcheon area must have a wide, arched opening. The udder should not have any scarring or bumps and must be well-attached.

Goat meat is called chevon or mutton. The body of a meat goat should be squared. It must look wide and heavy in the legs and chest and its back, flat and thick.

Horned and Unhorned Goats

Both the buck and doe can grow horns and beards. Unhorned goats when born possess the gene associated with hermaphroditism. Hermaphrodite goats have both male and female sex organs. Hornless bucks are generally fertile but they cannot mate because their semen is usually blocked. All goats born with horns are usually fertile. Combining horned goats with hornless ones have a 25 to 50 percent chance of producing hermaphrodite goats with no further breeding possible.

Where Can You Buy Goats

If you are just starting, you can contact an association for regional goat breeding. These associations have contacts with goat breeders. You can also look for local ranches and breeders. Be sure that the goats you will buy are healthy and have been under good caretakers. As much as possible, avoid buying from auctions because their current health condition cannot be assessed well.

Transporting Your Goat

Goats are easily stressed and frightened so they should be transported with great care. Never lift them by their horns, head, legs, hair or ears. Hold their bodies firmly instead. When transporting several goats, make sure you separate the small ones from the big ones to prevent serious

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