



38 things you should know before buying goats

- an excerpt from *Goat Tips & Tricks, Volume I*
500+ ways to take care of goats better, easier, cheaper

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*Don't get goats unless you know what you're getting into. Goats are gentle, intelligent, sweet and loving but sometimes annoyingly independent, mischievous, determined, and frustrating. Meet some goats and talk to experienced goat owners before you commit. And don't get goats unless you have a good sense of humor.

*Be aware going in that it's possible to make money with goats, but don't plan on it. If you raise commercial meat goats or top flight, registered dairy or meat goats, or you produce and market niche dairy products to a lot of customers—you might. Otherwise, probably not.

*Goats are social creatures. Don't plan to buy one goat. Every goat needs a companion, preferably another goat. A single goat is lonely and sad and she'll probably let you and your neighbors know it by screaming at the top of her lungs. The only exception would be a single bottle kid raised in the house with people, dogs, and other pets. But even a house-raised single needs companionship when and if he moves outdoors.

*Find a goat-savvy veterinarian before you buy your goats. Ask him what types of emergency medications to keep on hand and stock up before you need them. Program his number into your phone.

*Try to find a local mentor to advise you when you need it. Barring that, join goat-oriented Facebook groups or online forums like the Homesteading Today goat forum where experienced goat folks will be happy to answer your questions. Putting together a reference library of goat books or a folder of printed material downloaded from the Internet is a good idea too.

*Have good fencing in place before getting goats. Really good fencing, tall and stout. You'll need good fences to keep your goats in and predators like free-ranging dogs and coyotes out. If you don't know what to build, talk to your County Extension agent or do an Internet search for *fences for goats*.

*Don't plan to tether your goats instead of building good fences. A tethered goat is at the mercy of predators, including wild animals, free-roaming dogs, and ornery children. Tethered goats tip over their water buckets, wrap their ropes or

chains around trees, and get injured more quickly and seriously than you can imagine.

*Goats don't need fancy housing but they do need draft-free shelter where they can get away from bad weather, and they need good shade in the summertime. Avoid pressed-wood and cheap plywood when building new structures or redoing old ones. Most goats chew wood and they'll quickly destroy pressed-wood or flimsy plywood panels, both of which are processed using chemicals that can harm a goat.

*Even when sick, in quarantine, or kidding, goats should be within sight and sound of other large animals, preferably goats. Bucks need companionship too; another buck or a wether works well.



conveyance your goat can jump out of.

*Goats love routine and get upset when the routine changes. Try to feed and, especially, milk your goats within half an hour or so of the same times every day.

*Don't stress your goats any more than you have to. Stressed goats are prone to a host of health-related problems.

*Don't underestimate how high and how far a goat, even a mini goat, and especially a goat that doesn't want to be caught can jump. The same applies to hauling goats. Don't use a

*Goats are climbers and they're very good at it. Don't leave your car, truck, or tractor where your goats can reach it. You'll be sorry if you do.

*Horse owners take note: goats move into pressure instead of away from it. Pushing against a goat is counterproductive.

*Don't buy goats at sale barns unless you want to bring home foot rot, caseous lymphadenitis, sore mouth, ringworm, and a lot more nasty diseases and parasites. Buy healthy goats from experienced goat keepers, preferably those who test their stock for major diseases and have the paperwork to prove it.

*Each goat has his or her own distinct personality, which is partially but far from totally influenced by breed. Nubians are said to be noisy and clingy, Alpines aloof and ornery, Saanens and Sables ultra-laidback. Don't believe it. These qualities vary from individual to individual in every breed.

*Keep your feed room door securely latched. In fact, install two latches. Or a lock (and use it). Build goat-proof feed bins inside the feed room or install an old chest freezer as a grain bin. Accidental grain overload kills countless numbers of goats every year.

*Goats don't eat tin cans. In fact, they're astoundingly picky eaters and famous for wasting a lot of hay. Once it's on the ground, they won't touch it. Waste hay, however, makes good bedding.

*Don't abruptly change types or the amounts of feed you give your goats. Make changes over a period of a week or more so your goat's digestive microbes can adapt.

*Goats were designed to eat forage (browse, grass, hay). Feeding too much grain can lead to serious, even fatal digestive problems and it contributes to UC (urinary calculi) in bucks and wethers.

*Avoid poor-quality hay. Learn to recognize good hay (you'll find hay-buying tips later in this book) and then buy more than you think you'll need. Store it correctly, so it doesn't spoil.

*Goats are browsers, not grazers. Don't buy goats to mow your yard (you need sheep for that). They will, however, clear brush, brambles, saplings, and weeds from your pastures or woodlots.

*A goat doesn't have upper front teeth; instead, she has a hard dental palate on the roof of her mouth. Goats do have lower front teeth and back teeth on the top and bottom. Those back teeth are razor sharp. Don't put your hand where your goat might accidentally bite you.

*Goats are a 'laying out species' like deer, rather than a 'following species' like sheep and horses, meaning that does sometimes hide their newborn kids and go off with the rest of their herd for a nosh. If you can't find a doe's young offspring, don't panic. A careful search will usually turn them up.

*Don't over- or under-feed bottle kids and don't scrimp on what you feed them. Never feed milk replacers formulated for other species or replacers that contain soy instead of milk products. Homemade milk replacers are better than commercial versions; we'll talk about some of them later in this book.

*Horns are beautiful but horned goats tend to get their heads caught in fences, they accidentally poke their handlers (and it's painful), and they use their horns to bully their herdmates. Most goat owners prefer hornless goats. Nearly all goats grow horns unless they're disbudded as tiny kids. Disbudding means burning a

kid's horn buds before they start to grow. It's generally done at 5 to 10 days of age, depending on sex and breed. If disbudding is done incorrectly, the kid will grow scurs—deformed hornlike structures that (usually) aren't firmly attached to the animal's skull. Scurs tend to break off and bleed and if they grow toward the goat's skull, they'll have to be trimmed, which is a painful and gory chore. If you're a beginner, find an experienced goat breeder who can disbud your kids for a fee. Or, if you choose to do it yourself (if you do, you'll have to buy an expensive disbudding iron and a disbudding box to hold your kids while they're being disbudded), ask an experienced person to show you how it's properly done. Look at their goats if you can; if you see a lot of scurs, find another teacher.

*If you don't want goats with horns, don't buy horned goats thinking you can saw their horns off. A veterinarian can dehorn a goat but it's a bloody, painful, and dangerous process, and many vets refuse to do it. Horns are part of a goat's skull and the big holes left from dehorning open directly into the goat's sinus cavities. It takes a long time for those holes to heal and requires lots of nursing and packing materials. It isn't worth it and it's inhumane. Buy polled (naturally hornless) or disbudded goats or resign yourself to having horned goats.

*You can raise goats 'naturally' but it isn't easy and you'll need a knowledgeable mentor to do it right. Goats are host to serious internal parasites like barberpole worm, that can kill them unless they're wormed when they need it. Natural wormers work really well in some instances and not at all in others. Likewise, goats can quickly die of diseases that might respond to natural therapies if the goat survives long enough, but often doesn't. If you're not up for learning about natural/holistic goat care from the ground up, it's okay to combine regular wormers and veterinary care with natural therapies—that's what I do. The most knowledgeable holistic goat keeper that I know says she falls back on chemical wormers and antibiotics if a goat will die without them. You should too.

*It's amazingly easy to house train a goat if you start with a young bottle kid. Goats, especially mini goats, can make good house pets but since they're strong climbers and dedicated counter surfers, and they chew everything in sight, they aren't for the easily discouraged or faint of heart.

*Whether you have 2 goats or 20, your goats will establish a pecking order among themselves. Higher-ups pick on newcomers and on goats lower in the herd hierarchy than they are, and they can be very mean about it. Don't be surprised by a certain amount of in-fighting.

*If you plan to milk your goats, keep in mind that you'll have to milk once or twice a day (depending on how much milk your doe produces), morning and evening, the entire time she's lactating. Milking does don't take vacations or sick days; unless there's a reliable person to milk in your stead, neither can you.



*In most cases, a doe must be bred and have kids every year to produce milk. Some does 'milk through', meaning that they produce a significant amount of milk for one or more additional years without rebreeding, as long as they're kept in production through daily milking. The Swiss breeds (Saanens, Alpines, Oberhaslis, and Toggenburgs) are more likely to milk through than other breeds, but the ability varies from individual to individual between all of the dairy goat breeds.

*Don't jump into breeding right away. If you've never had goats before, get some experience by starting with pets or recreational wethers, or at least older bred does who know their job and can teach you the ropes. Especially, don't start with

bred doelings. If you do breed, plan ahead. What will you do with excess kids, especially bucklings?

*If you breed your doe, plan to be with her when she kids. Yes, goats have given birth without assistance since the dawn of time, but many of those goats and their offspring died in the process. A doe may occasionally take you by surprise, but for the most part, there are plenty of signs that will make you aware of imminent kidding. Know what to do in emergencies and be there to save the day.

*Don't underestimate a goat's sex drive. It isn't unheard of for kids to be conceived through gates and fences—it's happened here—so it's best to avoid keeping bucks and does in adjacent paddocks. Bucks, especially horned bucks, should be kept behind tall, sturdy gates and fencing; otherwise they'll get out.

*Bucks pee on themselves during rut (breeding season), which, depending on where you live and what breed you keep, can be from 3 months to all year. If you don't like strong, musky aromas, you might not want to keep a buck.

*Finally, never take a buck for granted. Bucks, even mini bucks, are extremely powerful and strongly hormone-driven, especially during rut, when even easygoing bucks sometimes misbehave. Don't turn your back on a buck and always plan an escape route when working in a buck's enclosure. Barring that, at least carry a walking stick or shepherd's crook for self defense. If a buck threatens you, smack his nose, not his forehead; if you whack his forehead, he'll think you're issuing a challenge. And if you're cornered by a buck, grab his beard and yank, then use his beard to lead him to the fence or gate before letting him go.

Visit Sue Weaver's Ozark Writer webpage at www.ozarkwriter.com to read her blog, download lots of free goodies including comprehensive resource guides to keeping goats, sheep, horses and donkeys; and to buy her ebooks.



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