



A BASIC GUIDE TO GOAT KEEPING

A Scottish Goatkeepers' Federation Leaflet

GENERAL FACTS

There are many different types of goats – Dairy, Fibre, Meat and breeds for pets.

Goats under one year old are called female or male kids (sometimes referred to as nanny & billy kids).

From the ages of one to two years they are known as goatlings (female) and bucklings (male).

Over the age of two years, females are often referred to as milkers (if in milk) and males are called adult males (sometimes billies).

Fibre and meat goats are generally referred to as Does (female) and Bucks (males).

Goats are herd animals and, in most cases, do not like to live alone. They are very adaptable to different systems of management, but all goats must have suitable housing, feeding, and care. All drinking troughs, buckets and feed bowls must be kept clean. Goats should have their feet trimmed on a regular basis, be appropriately vaccinated to prevent certain diseases, be regularly checked and treated (if necessary) for lice and other skin conditions. If a goat is sick or injured, it must have skilled attention.

If a person is not willing or able to provide basic care for their goats, they should not be keeping them at all.

Dairy goats are generally kept for milk production. Goat's milk is well known for being easier to digest than cow's milk and can alleviate skin conditions such as eczema. When in milk, dairy goats need to suckle their own kids or be milked twice a day. Yields vary from a couple of pints to over a gallon (8 pints) a day, depending on the quality and breeding of the goat. Many dairy goats will run through (continue to produce milk without having to kid again) into a second year. Even when suckling kids, the udder should be checked daily to ensure there are no problems.

Non-dairy e.g. Cashmere, Angora, Boer, Bagot and Pygmy goats, generally suckle their own kids and do not produce any excess milk, the supply of milk should dry up as their kids get older and are weaned onto solid feed.

Goats are born without horns but, unless the goat is naturally hornless (polled) the horns will start to grow within a few days of birth. Horns can be removed (disbudding) by a vet. It is illegal to disbud your own goats. It is not advisable to breed two polled goats together as this can produce hermaphrodites (possessing both male and female reproductive organs).

It is not recommended to keep uncastrated males of any breed as pets as they exude a strong smell from the scent glands on their heads and will spray urine on themselves (and you!). Castrated males can make good pets, but do bear in mind that males from dairy breeds, when fully grown, can be very large and quite boisterous.

HOUSING

Dairy goats are usually housed at night, in bad weather and through the winter. All breeds must have access to adequate shelter all year round, as goats suffer in windy, wet or cold conditions and suffer equally in hot weather and from flies. All breeds have little oil in their coats so can get soaked to the skin which can cause pneumonia and other illnesses.

A suitable 'goat house' should have adequate ventilation, but be free from draughts. Every goat should have adequate space to move around in. This will vary according to the size of goats kept, for example, an adult dairy goat requires 25sq.ft of floor space. They can be individually penned or live communally (care should be taken when feeding as weaker/smaller animals may get pushed out). NEVER leave housed animals tied up. DO NOT pen horned and hornless goats together, they naturally spar with one another and considerable damage can be caused by horns.

There must be adequate dry bedding in the form of shavings, straw or other suitable material which should be maintained to ensure it does not become saturated or excessively soiled.

A hayrack should be positioned high enough for the goats to reach in comfort. If it's too low they may soil the contents with their feet and a goat will starve to death rather than eat soiled food. Mesh hay nets are NOT recommended as goats can get their feet entangled or worse, their heads.

There must be a supply of fresh clean water at all times, goats will not drink fouled water. Be cautious with young kids as they have been known to fall into water buckets and drown!

FEEDING

Contrary to popular belief, goats are very fussy about what they eat. They are not useful ground clearers as they are browsers rather than grazers. They are experts at overturning food bowls, pulling hay on to the floor and soiling water buckets, so can be rather wasteful.

Food must be adequately stored to protect it from damp, contamination and vermin.

All goat kids must receive colostrum (the mother's first milk) immediately after birth as it contains important nutrients and anti-bodies. They will continue to require milk until they are at least four months old, in addition to being gradually weaned onto solid food. Kids will nibble at hay from a few weeks of age.

Good quality hay (green, sweet smelling and dust free) should be available at all times of the year, especially to productive (milk-producing) goats. A fully-grown non-productive goat should manage to maintain itself on fresh pasture and browsings (with hay on wet days) during the summer months, with additional concentrates in the winter months.

A concentrate ration should be fed daily to productive animals, growing youngstock and working males, and during pregnancy. There are many specially prepared goat mixes on the market including lower protein mixes for pygmies, dairy goat mixes and sheep mixes. Many people use additional bulk feeds such as oats, barley and sugar beet pulp (goats can eat un-soaked sugar beet). It is not advisable to feed male goats on beet pulp as there is a possibility that it can contribute to kidney stones or urinary calculi.

Vitamins and minerals are important to goats and although many are added to commercially produced sheep and goat mixes, it is recommended that vitamin/mineral licks are made freely available, especially during times when additional concentrates are not being fed. Mineral supplements, available from some feed merchants and smallholder suppliers can also be added to feed.

Ideally, grazing should be available during milder months of the year, but if it is limited, additional bulk food should be fed, such as alfalfa, vegetables (e.g. carrots, turnips and most green vegetables), tree branches (it's best to avoid oak as it can cause oak poisoning and do not feed those listed below), dried nettles and wilted thistles.

DO NOT FEED: Ragwort (especially if dried), Mayweed, Hemlock, Wild Clematis (Old Man's Beard or Traveller's Joy), Charlock (Field Mustard) Foxglove, Bryony, Woody and Deadly Nightshade, Honeysuckle, Fool's Parsley, Buttercups, Anemone, Lesser Celandine, All Bulbs, Laburnum, Rhododendron, Yew, Laurel, Walnut and all evergreen shrubs should be avoided. **IF IN DOUBT DO NOT FEED, MOST OF THE ABOVE PLANTS ARE DEADLY.**

CONTROL

The best way to keep goats in, is through adequate fencing (stock fencing or electric) as it allows free range grazing. The worst method is tethering as it requires regular moving along with access to shelter and water and regular supervision as entanglement and strangling can occur. All goats should be free of restraint at night.

UNWANTED ANIMALS

If a goat is no longer wanted, old or ailing, it should be humanely destroyed by either a licensed slaughter man or vet. It is not recommended to put goats into an auction market as they are often subjected to long journeys and further markets or sold for ritual slaughter.

It is illegal to bury dead animals (including stillborn kids and afterbirths), this excludes domestic pets. You must arrange for the animal to be collected by an approved transporter and taken for disposal to one of the following: knacker, hunt kennel, maggot farm, incinerator or renderer.

You can choose to use the National Fallen Stock Company to collect and dispose of your fallen stock. This is a not for profit, industry led community interest company offering a collection service for farmers and horse owners. See the [NFSCo website](#) or call the NFSCo Helpline on 01335 320014.

LEGISLATION – IN BRIEF

Identification and traceability are a vital part of animal disease control. All goat keepers are required to comply with current legislation.

If you have livestock (sheep, cattle, pigs, goats etc) you must:

Firstly, register your holding with the Rural Payments and Inspection Division (RPID). They will give you a County Parish Holding (CPH) number. This identifies your premises.

Next, you must contact your local Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) who will give you a Herd Number, which you need to be able to buy identification tags. You should also request a movement book and a holding register at the same time. You must also inform them if you cease to keep animals on your holding. All goats must be tagged (ear tag) by the time they are nine months old or when they first move off the holding (whichever comes first). The exception to this is for emergency trips to the vet. Animals 12 months of age and older must have two forms of identification. One being the initial tag and the second can be an ear tattoo (both ears can be used), second ear tag (sheep have to have an electronic tag) or pastern band.

All tags, bands and tattoos consist of the letters UK plus your herd number and an individual animal number. All tags are allocated by the Government's Ear Tag Allocation system – You can only buy them from approved suppliers, you can't buy them from Amazon!

Dalton is the only company that supplies ear tags and leg bands for goats.

www.daltontags.co.uk

If you have acquired goats that have no tags, tattoos or bands, you will need to get them tagged with an S tag (this is because they are no longer on their holding of birth). Further advice can be obtained through your local APHA Office.

All movements must be accompanied by a movement document (except visits to the vet), it does include taking a goat for mating and attending shows. The movement must be reported to the Scottish Animal Movement Unit (SAMU: samu@gov.scot) within three days of the movement.

If you are buying a goat, the seller should hand you the yellow and white copies of the movement document. Every move, including visits to the vet should be recorded in your holding register.

STANDSTILL RULES

The current standstill is 13 days. This means that a cloven hooved animal coming onto your holding triggers a standstill and you are not permitted to move any stock off your holding for 13 days, unless the on-coming animals are kept in authorised separation facilities for the 13 days. Authorisation is available from your local RIPD.

Taking a goat to another holding for mating purposes is exempt from the standstill. If attending only one show in each 13 day period, no standstill will be triggered, however if you are attending more than one show in any 13 day period the animals will need to be held in authorised separation facilities after the first show.

Further, in-depth information can be obtained from the Scottish Government website at www2.gov.scot Farming, Forestry and Rural issues.

Other web sites: www.gov.scot Livestock identification and traceability.

BOOKS: Goat husbandry by David McKenzie

INFORMATION/CONTACTS:

The Scottish Goatkeepers' Federation: www.scottishgoatkeepersfederation.com

Twitter: @ScottishGoats

Facebook: Scottish Goatkeeper's Federation

The British Goat Society: www.britishgoatsociety.com