



Caring for Goats & Sheep

Goats and sheep are both hardy, social, and intelligent animals that can thrive in various climates and environments with proper care. Whether you're raising them for milk, meat, fiber, or as pets, it's important to understand their basic needs to keep them healthy and productive. This manual covers essential aspects of their care, including feeding, housing, health management, breeding, and more.

Housing and Fencing

Shelter for Goats and Sheep

- **Space Requirements:**
 - Both goats and sheep need sufficient space to roam and graze. **At least 200 square feet per animal** is recommended, though more space is ideal.
- **Protection from Weather:**
 - Provide shelter to protect animals from **extreme weather** conditions (rain, snow, wind, and extreme heat). A simple three-sided barn is often enough.
 - Make sure the shelter is dry, draft-free, and well-ventilated. Overheating can be a concern in hot climates, so proper airflow is essential.
- **Bedding:**
 - Use **straw or wood shavings** as bedding. Keep bedding clean and dry to prevent diseases and parasites.

Fencing

- Goats are **escape artists** and require strong fencing. Sheep, though less likely to escape, still need sturdy enclosures.
 - **Height:** A **4-5 foot fence** is generally sufficient for sheep, but goats may need **6-foot** fencing due to their climbing and jumping abilities.
 - **Material:** Use **woven wire fencing** for both species, as it's durable and prevents escapes. Barbed wire is not recommended as it can cause injury.
 - **Security:** Ensure gates and other openings are secure, and check regularly for potential gaps where animals could escape.

Feeding and Nutrition

Diet for Goats

- **Forage:** Goats are **browsers** and prefer eating **shrubs, leaves, and weeds**. Make sure they have access to varied vegetation. Goats will graze grass but typically prefer browsing.
- **Hay:** Provide **high-quality hay** such as **timothy, orchard grass, or alfalfa**. Alfalfa hay is particularly useful for growing kids or pregnant does due to its higher calcium and protein content.
- **Grain:** Goats may require **grain** like oats or barley, especially if they are lactating or pregnant. However, grain should be fed **moderately** to avoid obesity or digestive issues.
- **Fresh Water:** Ensure clean, fresh water is available at all times.
- **Minerals:** Provide a **mineral block** or loose **goat-specific minerals**. Goats need **copper, selenium, and salt** to maintain good health.

Diet for Sheep

- **Forage:** Sheep are **grazers** and should have access to **grass, legumes, and some shrubs**. Their diet should be primarily grass or hay.
- **Hay:** Like goats, sheep need **high-quality hay** such as **timothy or orchard grass**. **Alfalfa hay** is too rich for most adult sheep but can be fed to pregnant ewes or growing lambs.
- **Grain:** Sheep generally don't require a lot of grain unless they are pregnant, lactating, or growing. Excessive grain can cause **bloat** and digestive issues in sheep.
- **Fresh Water:** Sheep also need constant access to **clean, fresh water**.
- **Minerals:** Offer **sheep-specific mineral supplements**, which are different from those used for goats. Ensure that the minerals are **low in copper**, as sheep are more sensitive to copper toxicity than goats.

Health Management

General Health Care for Goats and Sheep

- **Vaccinations:** Consult with your veterinarian to create a vaccination schedule for both species. Common vaccines include:
 - **CDT (Clostridium perfringens types C and D, Tetanus)**.
 - **Rabies** (depending on location).
- **Deworming:** Regular deworming is essential. Common internal parasites include **barber pole worm (*Haemonchus contortus*)** in goats and sheep.
 - Deworming should be based on fecal testing to avoid overuse of dewormers and prevent resistance.
- **Hoof Care:**
 - **Hoof trimming** should be done every 6-8 weeks to prevent overgrowth and lameness in both goats and sheep.
 - Check for cracks or infections and clean hooves regularly.
- **Sheep-Specific Care:** Sheep need to be sheared once or twice a year, especially wool breeds. Regular shearing helps prevent **wool rot** and **heat stress**.

Signs of Illness in Goats and Sheep

- **Changes in appetite** (loss of appetite or excessive hunger).
- **Diarrhea** or unusual feces.
- **Lethargy** or a lack of energy.

- **Coughing**, nasal discharge, or other respiratory issues.
- **Bloating**, especially in sheep, which can be a sign of **bloat**.
- **Limping** or signs of hoof problems.
- **Swollen joints**, which could indicate infection or arthritis.

If you notice any of these symptoms, it's crucial to seek veterinary attention.

Breeding and Reproduction

Goat Breeding

- **Sexual Maturity**: Female goats (does) reach sexual maturity around **6-12 months**, but breeding is often delayed until they are **18 months** for larger breeds.
- **Breeding Season**: Most goats cycle in the **fall** (autumn), and the breeding season is typically from **October to December**.
- **Gestation**: Goats have a **150-day** gestation period and generally give birth to **1-2 kids**. Ensure that the pregnant doe has a comfortable, clean space to deliver her kids.
- **Care for Pregnant Does**: Provide a **nutrient-dense diet** during pregnancy, especially calcium, and monitor the doe closely for any signs of **kidding difficulties**.

Sheep Breeding

- **Sexual Maturity**: Ewes (female sheep) generally reach sexual maturity at **5-12 months**.
- **Breeding Season**: Sheep are **seasonally polyestrous** (they come into heat during specific seasons), typically in **fall or early winter**. Rams (male sheep) should be kept separate from ewes except during the breeding season.
- **Gestation**: Sheep have a **145-day** gestation period, with ewes typically giving birth to **1-2 lambs**.
- **Care for Pregnant Ewes**: Provide high-quality hay and balanced minerals during pregnancy. Make sure the birthing area is clean, quiet, and safe.

Grooming and Maintenance

Goats

- **Coat Care**: Goats are typically low-maintenance when it comes to grooming. **Angora** and **Cashmere** goats, however, require regular grooming to maintain their coats.
- **Bathing**: Bathing is not usually necessary unless the goat is exceptionally dirty.
- **Teeth Care**: Goats may develop **dental issues** as they age. Check their teeth regularly for signs of overgrowth or problems with chewing.

Sheep

- **Shearing**: Sheep, especially wool breeds like **Merino**, need to be **sheared** annually. This is especially important to prevent **wool rot** and reduce the risk of heat stress.
- **Coat Care**: Wool breeds require more care, as wool can become matted or dirty, leading to skin issues.
- **Teeth and Hoof Care**: Regularly inspect teeth and trim hooves. Overgrown teeth or hooves can lead to significant health issues.

Socialization and Enrichment

- Both goats and sheep are highly **social animals** and should be kept in groups. It is recommended to have at least **two goats** or **two sheep** together to prevent loneliness and stress.
- Provide **enrichment activities** such as:
 - **Climbing structures** (for goats).
 - **Scratching posts** (for both goats and sheep).
 - **Toys and natural browsing material** (such as trees, logs, or branches).

Common Health Issues in Goats and Sheep

- **Parasites:** Internal parasites, like **barber pole worm** (*Haemonchus contortus*), can be a problem, especially in humid conditions.
 - Deworming and rotational grazing can help manage parasites.
- **Bloat:** This is more common in sheep than goats and can be life-threatening if not treated promptly. Make sure sheep have access to **quality forage** and avoid excessive grain feeding.
- **Foot Rot:** Regular hoof care is essential to prevent infections, which can lead to lameness.
- **Respiratory Infections:** Goats and sheep can develop respiratory issues, especially in cold, damp conditions. Ensure good ventilation in barns to avoid pneumonia.
- **Meningeal Worm (for Goats):** Goats are susceptible to **meningeal worm** (*Parelaphostrongylus tenuis*), which is carried by white-tailed deer. Symptoms include **weakness, lack of coordination, and paralysis**. Consult your veterinarian for prevention strategies.

Caring for goats and sheep involves providing proper nutrition, shelter, healthcare, and socialization. Regular health checks, hoof care, and parasite management are crucial for keeping these animals healthy. By ensuring they have adequate space, good nutrition, and a safe environment, you can enjoy the many benefits that goats and sheep bring, whether for milk, meat, fiber, or as friendly, social companions.