# How many kids do goats have? A guide to baby goats.

There are a number of interrelated factors, at each stage of production, which have a bearing on the number of offspring produced by goats. How many goats do you want to have? Do you have sufficient space for them; pregnant does require more space, and what will you feed them? Naturally, the condition of the doe has a major bearing on the health of the kids. Does require nutritionally sound feeding, plenty of exercise and dry shelter. Controlled joining is also an important factor in the production of healthy kids and herds.

Here are answers to some common questions about kids and kidding, as well as some useful information for goat breeders.

## How do you know a doe is pregnant?

* After about two weeks the pregnant doe’s stomach will start to visibly tighten
* Swelling in the uterus for first-time pregnant doelings
* Milk production will start to slack behind – you might want to take note of that when milking
* About three months in you will be able to notice movements from the kids

## How many babies does a goat have per pregnancy?

There are variations in pregnancy among the 200 distinct breeds of domesticated goats, but generally after the first pregnancy which is most often a single kid, a pregnant goat will usually be carrying more than one. In rare instances, she may have four or five. The ideal number of pregnancies is one or two because in cases of multiple births, more than 2, the additional kids do not often survive to weaning. The more kids that are born, the lower the average birth weights. This means that typically, the extra kids will have significantly lower birth weights and will be too weak to compete for their mother’s milk. The number of kids often depends on the breed. For example, the larger Boer doe and most of the Dairy Goat breeds (LaMancha, Oberhasli, Alpine, Nubian, Saanen, Toggenburg), averages two kids per pregnancy, whereas the smaller Nigerian Dwarf regularly produces more kids. It is worth noting the Nigerian Dwarf also breeds year round.

## How many kids can a goat produce in a year?

As most goats are seasonal breeders, three litters biannually is natural. However, best practice for commercial purposes is one or two kids per year. In order to ensure farm fertility, culling does who produce one kid per litter is recommended. Goats in ranging herds will also cycle out of season. For example in continuous joining herds, does will commonly have three kiddings each two years: 2.2 kids per year on average. Does become fertile aged from 5 – 9 months, (on average 7 months), but joining young does who are still growing and maturing may negatively impact on their long term fertility. Their bodies may also not be strong enough to carry the weight of twins or triplets. Most goats come in season and breed in the fall, between August and March. By their second season, normal, healthy does will be over a year old and heavy enough to carry two or three kids. It is therefore advisable to wait until a doe is 12 months old before joining her. Well managed does will be at their fertility and kidding peak from age 5 – 7. In exceptional cases, perhaps until 12 or even 14 years.

## Do goats usually have twins?

It is very common for goats to have twins and triplets, although three kid pregnancies are less common than two. This frequency of multiple birth kidding also depends on the breed of goat, but most does, following their first kidding, will have twins, up to three sets in a two-year period over their breeding life.

## How long do goats stay pregnant?

The normal gestation period for goats is between 145-180 days, (150 is the average, or roughly five months.)

## How to get the best results from breeding goats?

Taking good care of the does is the best way to help produce healthy offspring. It is crucial to meet the nutritional needs of the doe by supplying additional protein in preparation for breeding, then feeding mostly hay, with a little grain during the first five months of pregnancy, and extra food during the last four weeks of gestation. Managing the herd will ensure the best yields which means controlled joining, together with considered selection of joiners.

## What should you expect at kidding time?

A few days prior to delivery, the foetus will appear to drop as it moves into the correct position for birthing. The doe’s sides, under the spine, right in front of the hip bones will seem to hollow out, and the flesh along the top of the pelvic bone will slip down, making the lower spine stand out more. When she’s ready, the doe will often get restless, exchanging the loafing around of late pregnancy for more agitated behavior as she prepares to deliver her kids. Healthy does of appropriate weight and breeding will rarely have any complications. Depending on the individual goat, labor may be announced with loud bleating or silence. The kid will usually appear within minutes of the commencement of hard labor. The doe will stand up, the kid then lands with a thud on the ground, and if healthy, it will stand, albeit very unsteadily, and begin sneezing. The firstborn’s siblings will generally arrive at intervals of two to three minutes. When she’s finished delivering the kids, she will pass the placenta which she may well eat.

Once the newborn kids have found their legs, they will search for something to suck on. At first, they won’t know where, so they’ll experiment on different parts of the mother until they find a teat. Kids that nurse within the first twenty-four hours of life and receive colostrum will usually survive and thrive. Watch for kids which are too cold, separated from the mother and the others, bleating for no obvious reason or lethargic. These runts may not make it without assistance. They may require bottle feeding and warming. After seven days the doe’s milk no longer contains colostrum so the kids can be weaned.

Gestation and kidding are natural processes so all things being equal, it is correct and careful management which will ensure healthy herds. Does of the right age, weight and condition will produce an average of 2.2 kids each year after a 150 day gestation period.

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