



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

GOATS FOR HOME  
MILK PRODUCTION

### Selecting a Doe

When selecting a doe, there are three basic considerations: milk production, appearance and herd health. It is not necessary to buy a purebred doe if she is to be used only for milk production.

A good doe should produce more than 1,200 pounds of milk during a 10-month lactation cycle. This is more than 2 quarts a day average, but production will vary from day to day, and there will be a "dry" period of about two months when the doe will produce no milk. Your doe must be bred and produce kids each year to keep her producing milk.

Production records are not always available, but if they are you should check them before purchasing your doe. If you are buying a young doe that has never produced, ask to see the production records of her dam and those of her sire's other female offspring.

Make sure the doe you buy has good teeth, a glossy coat and skin that is free of sores and dandruff. She should be in good physical condition but not fat. Her udder should be large before milking and considerably smaller after milking. The udder should feel soft and pliable after milking and should be free of hard lumps, lesions or scars. Teats should be about "hand size." Goats with extremely large or small teats are harder to milk. Also, kids may have difficulty nursing does with large teats.

Pendulous udder, a condition where ligaments holding up the rear of the udder break down and cause the udder to sag, is sometimes a problem with dairy animals. Avoid purchasing a goat with this problem because her udder will be more prone to injury and infection.

Other things you can do to improve your chances of purchasing a healthy goat include checking the ears for sores, scars or scabs; feeling under the jaw for knots, lumps or growths; and observing whether the hoofs have been properly trimmed. If the doe is lame, she may have foot rot, especially if her hoofs are overgrown. Also, examine her for lice, ticks and earticks.

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It also is a good idea to contact a veterinarian to have your doe tested for tuberculosis and brucellosis at the time of purchase. Although these diseases are rare in dairy goats, they can be transmitted to humans through the milk from an infected animal.

### Shelter and Space Requirements

You will need a shelter with about 24 square feet of space for each goat. The shelter should be clean, dry and free from drafts. Bedding is desirable, but not absolutely necessary. However, since goats are sensitive to cold, bedding is helpful during cold weather. The manure and bedding make good compost or soil amendments for your garden.

Goats should have at least 200 square feet of space for exercising, preferably adjacent to their shelter so they can go in and out at will. Since goats are natural climbers, you will need a fence at least 48 inches high and will probably be better off with one that is 60 to 72 inches high. The fence should be made of non-climbable material such as woven wire. It may be a good idea to place a wooden box or some other object in the middle of the yard for the goats to climb on. Make sure that the gate locks securely as goats are very good at opening gates.

### Feeding the Doe

Feed does according to their stage of production. Dry does in good condition will do fine on good alfalfa hay, clover hay, or pasture. If the dry does are thin or the forage is of low quality, you will need to feed them about 1/2 to 3/4 pound of concentrates (grain or other high energy feeds) per day until they are in good condition.

Pasture, preferably a good mixture of legumes and grasses, is the easiest and generally the cheapest method of feeding goats. You will need about 1/2 acre per goat if the grazing season is 5 to 6 months. If fences are inadequate, goats can be tethered, but this means extra work because the goats have to be moved daily and they have to be watched closely to make sure they do not get tangled in their tether.

For milking does fed good alfalfa, clover, or other legume hay, you will need a concentrate that has about 12% crude protein (CP). With a good mixed hay containing both legumes and grass as the forage, the concentrate should have 16% CP. If the hay or pasture has no legumes or is poor quality, you should feed a concentrate containing 20% CP. The crude protein percentage is given on the label of commercially prepared concentrates. As a rule of thumb, feed milking does 1 to 1 1/2 pounds of concentrate per day if the roughage is of good quality. If the concentrate being fed is all grain, you should supplement the doe with calcium. Watch the doe's physical condition and milk production closely and adjust her feed accordingly.

If you are feeding a good legume hay as the roughage your goats will probably need additional phosphorus. The easiest way to supply phosphorus is by mixing dicalcium phosphate, available at most feedstores,

or other high phosphorus supplement 50:50 with salt and putting this 'out free-choice. If you live in a low iodine area, it might be wise to use iodized salt instead of plain salt in the mixture. If you are feeding roughages other than legume hay, certain trace minerals essential to the diet may be lacking and you should substitute trace mineralized salt for the plain salt. Most commercial concentrate mixes have adequate trace minerals and salt and you shouldn't have to worry about supplementation if you are feeding a commercial concentrate mix as part of the diet.

Make sure that clean, fresh water is available to your goats at all times.

### Milking

Cleanliness in milking is extremely important. Milk twice a day as close to 12 hours apart as possible. Brush the doe to remove loose foreign material from the coat and wash her udder, teats and your hands before each milking. Discard the first few streams of milk from each teat because they may have some foreign material in them. You should have a seamless, stainless steel milking pail to facilitate cleaning and prevent bacteria buildup.

Strain the milk immediately through several layers of cheesecloth or special filters that can be purchased from a dairy supply store. Cool the milk quickly to 40 to 50 degrees by setting the milk containers in a bucket of water (ice water or flowing water cools the milk faster) and then refrigerate it.

Milking utensils should be rinsed with cold water, scrubbed in hot soapy water, and then scalded in boiling water after each milking. They should be stored in a dry, dust-free place.

### Breeding and Kidding

The breeding season for goats is usually from September to March. Does come into heat about every 21 days (17 to 25 days) and remain in heat for 1 or 2 days. Breed young does when they are 12 to 15 months old and weigh from 85 to 90 pounds. Does should be in peak physical condition at breeding. Gestation length is approximately 5 months. A doe usually has 2 kids but can have from 1 to 4 kids.

If you want to keep female kids for milking you should breed your doe to a buck from a high producing dam and, if possible, known for siring high-producing daughters.

A few days before your doe is due to kid, isolate her in a separate pen. Provide her with clean, dry bedding and plenty of fresh water. You may want to feed her some bran as a substitute for part of her concentrate during the last few days of pregnancy. After she kids she should be fed concentrates in slowly increasing amounts until she is up to her normal consumption for milk production. Remember, make all feed changes gradually or your goat may get sick.

Wipe the newborn kid dry with a clean towel and clip and paint his navel with iodine to prevent infection. The kid should receive a feeding of colostrum (doe's first milk) within 2 to 3 hours after birth. Colostrum is vital to the kid because it is a physic and supplies antibodies and vitamins necessary for good health. The easiest way to feed the colostrum is to let the kid nurse the doe for 2 or 3 days, but it is possible to remove the kid from the doe and feed the colostrum from a bottle with a nipple.

The doe and her kids should be separated early. It will be necessary to teach the kids to drink from a pan or a bottle with a nipple. Feeding the kids from a pan will be easier than from a bottle, especially if you are going to mix the milk twice a day.

For the first few days, the kids should be fed three times a day and then twice a day. They will consume 1 1/2 to 2 pints of milk per day and they can be fed whole cows' milk or non-fat dry milk, but the change from goats' milk to cows' or non-fat milk should be done over a period of a few days. Lamb milk replacer is a good alternative to feeding cows' milk or non-fat dry milk. Lamb milk replacer has more fat and protein than the other two and will supply the kids with higher energy from which they will make faster gains. Be sure to keep all utensils clean to retard bacterial growth.

Keep fine stemmed, leafy alfalfa or other good roughage available to the kids at all times. Kids will start eating hay and grain at 10 days to 2 weeks. After the kids are about 3 weeks old, give them some calf starter or other high-protein concentrate once or twice a day. This will help to get them on solid feed and will increase their gains.

Wean kids at 4 or 5 months of age, and feed them good-quality roughage and 3/4 to 1 pound of dairy calf growing ration or other concentrate.

#### HELPFUL PUBLICATIONS

Walsh, Helen. Starting Right with Milk Goats. Garden Way Publishing, Charlotte, Vermont 05445.

McNulty, R. W., A. D. Aulenbacher, E. C. Loomis, and G. L. Crenshaw. Your Dairy Goat. University of California Cooperative Extension (Leaflet 2736)

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