



The Goat Source

A Beginner's Guide To Breeding Your Goat

By Leslie A. Applegate
The Goat Source
13611 NCR 9
Wellington, CO 80549
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www.goatsource.com
goatsource9@cowisp.net

How Do I Tell When To Breed My Goat?

Unless you have wether goats, or keep your goats strictly for pets, your goal is to get your female goats bred on a regular basis to maximize production. This is much easier to do if you observe a few simple basic management practices. A healthy doe of breeding age should cycle on a consistent time frame, breed easily, carry kids with no problems, kid normally, and come into production with a minimum of fuss. This sounds like a large order, but is not all that difficult to accomplish with good management and healthy sound goats.

The goat is classified as seasonally polyestrous. This is a fancy way of saying that she comes in heat several times in the fall. Most goats start coming in heat when the days begin getting shorter in the fall. They will usually behave differently than normal - bleating or calling constantly, flagging or wagging the tail off and on or when you run your hand down her rump, & mounting other goats. Milk production may be down and she may not eat the same as usual. If there is a buck nearby, she might plant herself at the part of the fence nearest the buck and won't want to leave. Of course there is the exception to this rule. Some does never show any signs of heat. This is called a "silent heat" and can be very frustrating. Most does with silent heats will show signs of interest when teased with the buck, but not always. If you don't have a buck, get a "buck rag". This is a rag that is rubbed on the buck until it is nice and smelly and kept in an airtight jar. The doe gets to smell it every day twice a day until she shows interest.

Sometimes, the only way to get a doe bred is to run her with the buck. Do this for a minimum of three weeks after the first breeding, just in case it didn't take and she comes back in heat.

Kids are hard to catch in heat, so I pen breed them. Use a gentle buck or a buck kid close to the doelings ages. A large aggressive buck could easily injure your kids. Keep accurate records – when the buck was put in with the kids, note all heat s that you observe. Check rear ends twice a day at lease for messy tails which may indicate that they were bred. Write down all observations. It is handy to have a collar with a number tag on each doeling for easy identification on your note sheets where you may not have room to write her name out. I use large tags that can't be easily swallowed and are brightly colored and easy to find if lost, on a collar with a weak link.

When Should I Breed My Goat?

Let's look at when to breed your goats. Doelings can generally be bred in their first year. I raise Nubians and breed by weight, not age. When a doeling reaches seventy pounds, she is big enough to breed. Some early kids may reach this weight before the daylight begins decreasing enough to bring them in heat. Late kids may cycle before they are seventy pounds. I will fudge on weight if it would mean keeping the doeling over as a dry yearling. I have kept dry yearlings three times and swore I would never do it again! A dry Nubian yearling is one of the most obnoxious animals around!! Every time I kept one over, it never failed that they freshened either with a poor udder or no milk. NEVER AGAIN!! (Plus you are losing a year of their productive life). Check with an experienced breeder who has the same breed of goats you are raising for age and size recommendations for breeding.

Conditioning Your Goat for Breeding Season

Goats should come into breeding season in good flesh, but not fat. Fat goats have a harder time conceiving and more problems kidding than does in good shape. A common practice is "flushing" a doe before breeding season. This means the doe is on a rising plane of nutrition coming into breeding season. Flushing helps a doe to ovulate more eggs and conceive more kids. Obviously, this is not a good idea if the doe is fat to begin with. After a doe is bred is not the time to put her on a diet!! So, make sure your girls are trim and in good shape before breeding season and avoid a lot of problems.

What About a Buck?

If you don't own a buck, you need to make prior arrangements with the breeder who has a buck you want to use. Find out the health requirements from them. You may need to blood test your doe for CAE or have a current health certificate. This varies from breeder to breeder. Some will only give your goat a visual inspection. Please – don't take a sick goat to be bred! Chances are she won't conceive and she may spread disease to other goats. Most buck owners will refuse to breed an obviously sick goat to their buck. Some breeders will not allow goats with horns in with their buck.

Check out ahead of time if boarding your doe is an option. If you have difficulty catching her in heat, you may wind up boarding her until she comes in. Prices vary but are usually reasonable. Take a close look at the facilities where your doe will be housed. If you don't feel comfortable with the arrangements, take your girl home! I once took a doe to be bred to a very good buck, and she wasn't in standing heat. It was a long drive and I considered leaving her there until I saw the fences (or lack of). I took her home. An injured goat is not worth the convenience!!

She's Bred... – isn't she?

Watch your doe carefully to see if she comes back into heat after breeding. I start watching the girls about 18 days after breeding and after 25 days, I mark them down as possibly bred on the calendar. There are several ways to make sure she is bred. One is the “wait and see” method. If she kids about 5 months later, she was bred!! Other methods include ultrasound and blood tests. Ultrasound is fairly accurate after 45 days. I wait until all of the does bred in that group are over 45 days, and then have the vet out to check all of them at once. Have a list of when they were bred available for the vet.

There are two types of blood tests that I know of. One is a test for progesterone levels after breeding (milk can also be used for this test) and the other is for pregnancy specific protein B. Talk to your vet about which test(s) they recommend.

Once your doe is bred, monitor her carefully, feed her right and have fun with her new kids when they are born, 5 months from now!!

Resources

Fias Co Farm – Many good articles and pictures

<http://fiascofarm.com/goats/index.htm>

Artificial Insemination info

http://www.cahe.nmsu.edu/pubs/_d/d-704.html

The Goat Farmer

<http://www.caprine.co.nz/wa.asp?idWebPage=6658&idDetails=111>

Maryland Small Ruminant Page

<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/repro.html>

Recommend Reading

Your Goats (Paperback)

Good reviews, used copies available. This is a very good basic book for kids as well as adults.

by Gail Damerow

Raising Meat Goats for Profit (Paperback) Good reviews, used copies available

by Gail B. Bowman