



Goats

Transcript – Choosing Goats

Hi there. Tasha Greer, contributor at The Grow Network, here to talk with you today about raising goats. Last time I was out here, I was not wearing shorts and a tank top. I was completely geared up because we'd just had a huge snowstorm and that's a reality you have to face when you're raising goats. It's a year-round activity, all weather, whatever the conditions you got to go out and take care of your goats. But if I didn't scare you off with that last episode and you're still here with me, then you may actually be the kind of person that can bring home goats and have great success with them. And if that's the case, I'd like to give you some more information today about why goats are so awesome for your home or homestead and also give you some pointers to help you pick the breed that's going to work best for you.

Goats are one of the most sustainable, easy to raise meat sources, and even here in the United States, 80% of our goats are actually raised for meat. You won't find that meat usually at your average grocery store. You do have to go to maybe some sort of multicultural or ethnic flavored grocery store to find goat's meat or you might even have to buy goats at auction and do the processing yourself, but there actually is a pretty significant amount of goat's meat produced here in the United States. Additionally, goats are small enough in size that just a couple of dairy goats can provide all the milk that your family needs. Now if you wanted a cow, even a mini cow, that's usually going to be more milk quantity than you actually need to use on a regular basis, so a goat is a great small animal that you can get a large quantity of milk from so that you can meet your home dairy needs.

Additionally, another great reason to think about goats these days is to use them for fiber. Similar to the way that you use sheep for wool, goats can have cashmere or angora-style coats that you can shear off to make natural fibers. So, if you're looking for durable goods and ways to make sweaters and materials and blankets and things like that, then goats could be a great option. Now I'm gonna be honest, I'm not going to focus on fiber because I don't raise them for fiber and I don't have a lot of experience with them, but I did want to make you aware because fiber breeds can provide small quantities of milk and they can also be used for meat. So, you could actually raise fiber if that's your goal and also get those other by-products.

However, if you really want to raise goats specifically for meat or specifically for dairy, then I highly recommend that you focus on breeds that have been developed over time for those purposes. Dairy goats tend to have more milk production for their size than other kinds of goats. They also tend to have leaner frames so they spend more energy on milk production and not on putting on extra weight the way that a meat goat would. And that makes them a little more efficient as far as feeding them because dairy goats eat a lot and so you need to get them a bunch of food every day so that they can produce the milk that you want and so you really want to pick a breed that's going to make efficient use of that feed.

There are small-sized dairy goats and large-sized dairy goats. Now I've got Nigerian Dwarfs which I love because they're about the size of a golden retriever and if I have to if they're having a bad day or whatever, I can pick them up and throw them on the milk stand to get my job done. So, I really like how easy they are to handle. The Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats also have exceptionally high milk fat content. Some analysis actually shows 6.5 percent milk fat which is extraordinary. Problem with the Nigerian dairy goats is that they are small, so they produce smaller quantities of milk. On average your Nigerian Dwarf dairy goat will produce between a quart of milk and a half-gallon of milk a day at most. For a small family, you get a couple of those goats; you could make a little bit of cheese, you could have the milk that you need for your regular purposes and they might work perfectly fine. But if you really need larger quantities of milk because you want to make a whole bunch of cheese or you want to venture into making butter and also goat milk soap, then you want to think about either having a whole lot of Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats which means more work on the milk stands so that's not usually the way people go or you want to think about a bigger goat.

Now the Nubian is also considered an excellent option for a small dairy herd because the Nubian goats also have very high fat percentage. On average the number you think of is about 5 percent which is still good because that's in the range of a dairy cow, but they're so much bigger. They're between 135 and 170 pounds and they can produce one to two gallons of milk a day depending on the age and how long -- how many babies they produce and also their genetic history and things.

Other choices like the Alpine goats; those are a very common dairy goat. They're also a big goat. They have a little bit less fat than the Nubian, but they're very docile personalities, they're excellent on the milk stand, they can produce one to two gallons of milk a day; they tend to push closer to that two-gallon limit and so get a good Alpine dairy goat and that could be all that your family needs. A lot of people who have dairy herds at home sometimes end up with extra kids and they do raise those out and use them for meat. It's not going to be the best meat production, but it's a great way to use the animals that you aren't able to sell or place in other homes. So, you can definitely get meat from your dairy goats, but if you really just want to be focused on meat production then you want to think about meat breeds.

Now there are sort of two extremes on the meat breeds that I want to share with you. So, the pygmy goat which a lot of people think as pets, those are actually a meat breed because they get pretty muscular, they put on a lot of weight. If you're keeping them as pets, you know, sometimes they get a little chunky, but they're, you know, sort of the very small side of the meat breed. Then on the very large side of meat breeds, you've got the Boer goats and a Boer goat, the average is 350 but not too long ago, I met a 400-pound Boer goat, so those can get very large. Now, a lot of people when they're raising meat, they don't specifically focus on a breed. They just find whatever good, sort of muscular goats that they can buy inexpensively and they'll breed those and the ones that do well they keep and continue to breed and the ones that don't, they process for meat. So, you don't have to have a particular breed for raising meat and in fact, a lot of people go with mixed breed goats because it's a lot less expensive to get started. You can buy a goat for \$50 or \$75 if you're not focused on having a specific breed for making meat, so that's definitely something to consider.

Once you've narrowed down your breeds, then it's the exciting part of going and buying goats. And honestly, this is probably the toughest part of the process to get started because first of all, you have to find someone selling goats. They're becoming a lot more popular these days so that's getting easier to do, but there are a lot of people who sort of went, "Oh I want goats and now I have babies," and you know, sometimes they might have great babies, but sometimes they haven't quite developed their breeding skills yet and those babies might not be perfect. So you really have to be a very good buyer if you want to get good, healthy goats and the way that you do that is look at the breed standards so that you know how tall your goats are supposed to be, what sort of body conformation they are supposed to have, you'll also want to know what a healthy right-sized goat looks like for the age you're buying at.

After you do a visual inspection to make sure that the goat you're considering matches up to the breed standards or that they have the important qualities you're looking for like good muscle structure if you're thinking about a meat goat, and you also make sure they're about the right size for their age, then you want to dig into some serious details before you make your purchase. For example, when I look at a new goat, I don't just look at the goat I'm buying, but I ask to review the entire herd. I ask to see the parents in particular, but my goal in doing that is to make sure that one, they're being raised in a healthy environment so that I'm not accidentally bringing home any potential health risks if I add a new goat to my herd, but I also want to see that everybody is in good shape and that they aren't showing any visible signs of diseases. And if there are any goats that aren't in perfect condition like their coats look a little ragged or maybe they're a little bit too lean or even a little bit too fat, then I'll usually ask questions about those goats to ascertain if there might be any hidden health problems. So sometimes it happens, goats get parasite overload and you have to give them a dewormer and so then it might take them a week or two to fully recover from that process. If they had a really bad episode, it could take them a couple months. So, there could be good explanations, but you want to listen to those and make sure that they sound reasonable to you.

There's also one particularly tricky virus that you have to be aware of when you're buying goats. It's called Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis or CAE for short because that's a mouthful, so most of us just say CAE. That is a virus that is transmissible throughout the entire herd. It's not transmissible to humans, but if a doe has it, they can certainly pass it to their children through the milk and if any of the herd has active symptoms then they are more likely to be able to transmit it to other members of the herd just through contact from food and water and shared housing and things like that. It's a really tricky virus though because as long as goats are healthy and not symptomatic, they could be carrying it, and no one would ever know. And even in herds that test continuously for CAE, some of those tests will show up as

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negative because goats have such a low virus load that they just aren't detected in the tests. So you'll never be 100 percent sure that you're buying from a herd that does not have CAE, but if all the goats are healthy, nobody's exhibiting any of the qualities, the owner's not aware of any history and maybe they are even doing any testing, then your chances are better that you're bringing home a goat that's not infected.

If you're going to be doing any breeding, then you also want to get as much information as you can about the genetic history of the goat that you're buying and if you're raising goats for dairy or you're raising them as a regular meat supply, then breeding is going to be very important. The things you'll want to know for example are how many kids they typically have because, you know, the small goats, the Nigerians they usually have three goats every time they kid and three goats is a good number because the goats are usually small in size and the labor's pretty easy. If a Nigerian is only having one or two goats every time they breed, there is some potential that those kids might be a little bit too large and there could be extra complications when the moms have their babies. Now with the larger goats, they usually only have one to two kids; they don't usually have triplets and so you'd want to make sure they were only having one to two and but those kids were right-sized and that there were no complications during labor. Even if your goat is just a doeling and you have no experience with how they'll do when they have labor, you can find out quite a bit about how they're likely to do by learning about their parents and their grandparents.

Another thing to ask about is the breeder's parasite management program. Now there are a couple of philosophies on parasite management. The old philosophy is that people would just pre-emptively treat their goats for parasites several times per year. Unfortunately, what we've discovered over the years is that when you regularly treat goats that may or may not need that treatment, the parasites start to be more resistant to the treatment and the goats become more dependent on the treatment. So as a result, when you have a real problem, a serious infestation, you'll have a harder time fighting it if you've got goats or parasites that are resistant to treatment. So, the new practice, what's more common these days, particularly among people who are concerned about the level of antibiotics and pharmaceutical medications that are entering their food strains, we really only use medications when we absolutely have to.

I'm going to be giving you a lot of useful links in your homework, but if you have the budget for it, I really recommend that you get a couple books to have in your library before you bring home goats. The first one I want to suggest to you is this, [*Raising Goats Naturally*](#) and this one is really sort of an excellent overview on all of the potential that goats have, the different ways you can use them. It goes into a lot of the sort of crafting that you can do like making cheese, making goat sausage, even making soap and things. So, if you're thinking you're going to be using goats for a lot of different reasons, this is a good book to look at. Next, I want to tell you about this book. This [*Holistic Goat Care*](#) book, it's really quite the textbook. It gives you a lot of great information about raising goats naturally and it will go into more detail than we can cover in an introductory course to raising goats. Down the road when you start dealing with parasite issues, because that will come up, this book has great resources on how to deal with that. In particular, the one thing I really like about it, is it shows you how to use a microscope to do your own analysis.

In our next episode, we're going to be looking at goat shelters and also at pasture to give you a bit more of an idea about what kind of space you might need for the goats you're thinking about and how to keep them safe, comfortable and healthy. I will see you on the other side and enjoy your homework and do a great job on your quiz.