



## Goats

### Transcript – Introduction

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Hi there everyone. It's Tasha Greer, contributor at The Grow Network, and today I'm here to talk to you about raising goats. Obviously, I'm standing out here in quite a bit of snow. Yesterday we had a storm come through. We got 18 inches in about six hours. We had to clear off our roof so that it didn't cave in. We actually had one of the panels in the greenhouse, you know, collapse a little bit from the weight, so this is a big storm. It came down fast and hard and I still had to make a path from my house to my goat barn and come and take care of my girls. And in fact, because it was so cold, I actually had to bring them warm water throughout the day just to make them comfortable and I had to give them a lot of hay because they couldn't go out on pasture. And so I'm actually standing here in the middle of the snow because I want to make sure that that idea of taking care of goats every day regardless of the weather or what your mood is or what else you have going on, just make sure that before you ever bring home your first goat that you know this is a daily commitment and the lifespan of a goat is on average 15 years.

And that's part of what this video series is for; I want to tell you the real deal about keeping goats and make sure that you are prepared before you ever bring your first goat home. Now, you might be like me and go out and get goats before you even have a goat barn. You know, sometimes it happens, so if you are in that position of, "Ah, I have goats. Now, what do I do?" That's okay too, but I do wanna encourage anybody who's thinking about this for the first time, do it slow and steady, make your preparations in advance and, you know, know what you're in for before you start down that road. That being said, goats are amazing, and you'll find that very quickly your world starts to revolve around them. For example, you'll end up with a goat vocabulary.

So, the first thing is that when we talk about male and female goats, we use very specific terms to distinguish their age and their purpose. A doe is sexually mature, physically prepared to have babies, and has already actually, you know, shown that she is fertile by being pregnant or actually have already kidded. And kidding is the term that we use to explain the process of making babies. Kids are baby goats and the process of a mama having babies is called kidding. Now when I say the term doeling, I am talking about a young female goat who is not ready to breed yet. When I say the term yearling, I am talking about a female goat that is at least one year in age and has not yet been bred. So, a yearling is like the step right before becoming a doe; it's between doeling and doe. So, when you're looking to buy goats, particularly if you're planning to breed if you can get a yearling that means that you can go ahead and breed them as soon as you bring them home. If you get a doe, that means they've already been bred and so you could ask some good questions about, "well how many babies did they have? How did their pregnancy go? Did they have any health problems?" Those kinds of things and when you're talking about doelings, they're pretty young and we don't usually know yet whether they're perfect for breeding.

On the male side of things, the buck. The buck is already mature and by mature in a buck, that can be anything over six months of age, but they have already impregnated females. So, a buck has already done the deed and proven themselves effective and so they will have traits and qualities like peeing on their face, which I know people hear about that and go, "Ah," but it's not the worst thing in the world, I promise. It's just, you know, it's a little stinky at times, but it's not terrible. But they're already exhibiting those qualities of being a buck and can attract females to them and have already demonstrated their aptitude for impregnating females. So that's what the term buck means. Now buckling means a young male who has not yet been exposed to females and is, you know, pretty much ready to go. And so, they're usually, you know -- you might have to wait a month or two when you get them, but they're usually already weaned from their mamas, they've shown promise for breeding and so they have been kept intact. They have not been

castrated. So that's what a buckling is, but we don't really know how they do in, you know, the field yet because they have not been exposed to females.

And when you hear, you know, the term weather, a weather is a male goat who has been castrated and once a male is castrated, as long as that process has happened when they're young and most of us do it at around eight weeks of age, they don't exhibit any of the qualities of becoming a buck. They won't pee on their face, they aren't aggressive towards females, they aren't aggressive towards people who come near their females. They tend to be really great pets. You may also hear the terms billy and nanny. Those are used a lot in the country particularly among people who are kind of more like backyard breeders. They're raising animals, but they're not trying to like win prizes or anything for their breeding abilities. They will sometimes call the male goats that are still intact and basically able to be bred billies and females of any age who are also able to be bred, nannies. So those terms aren't quite so technical, but you do hear them a lot in the country setting.

All right, with those sort of terminology basics behind us, I want to take you to meet my does, but I do want to point out before I walk into that gate, there's a reason why I'm wearing this very robust Carhartt jacket. It's because this is one of the only things that my goats won't chew through. I don't know if you noticed this, but I'm wearing ripped pants. The backs of all of my shirts are chewed on. Goats are nibblers by nature and so whenever I go to see them, I put on ragged clothes because I'm not really -- I could sit there and tell them no and, you know, continuously retraining them, but nibbling is just part of their character. And so rather than fighting against nature, I just dress appropriately when I'm working with goats. So, throughout this video series, you'll probably see me in my shabbiest work attire, but that is intentional and I suspect once you have your own goats, you'll have your sort of goat wardrobe as well.

In general, goats are very hardy and healthy animals, but there are few things you have to be aware of to keep them healthy and happy. The first is that goats absolutely need shelter. I know a lot of us see these, you know, sort of images of goats out on pasture, up in the mountains; it just looks so beautiful. They're out in snow and eating whatever weeds or emerged beyond the snow, but the truth is goats actually do need a warm, safe place to go whenever the elements and conditions get, you know, really rough. Because goats are so weather-sensitive, you do often have to provide them with supplemental feed. You know, sometimes it can just be, you know, having some hay around for them to eat. Sometimes you may have to actually get something with better nutrition like some goat pellets depending on how long they're going to be off pasture. So your conditions will have a big impact on what your feed costs will be, but there will almost always unless you live in a particularly dry climate that also happens to have a whole lot of food for the goats to stay healthy on, you're almost always going to have, you know, some food costs and depending on where you live, you'll probably have to buy supplemental minerals and you know, those don't cost a fortune, but they are a regular cost you'll have to be aware of.

Goats are herd animals and when I say a herd animal, I don't mean that they want one companion. I mean that if you want to avoid having behavioral challenges, you need at least three goats. Now there are some people that will effectively keep two goats together and, you know, that ends up being okay, but usually, those goats are the ones more apt to escape. They tend to be ones that put pressure on the fences, you know, they kind of just give you a little bit more trouble and, you know, sometimes it's easier to just go ahead and get a third goat.

The other thing is the goats have parasites. I know, eh, parasites. It sounds horrible, but the truth is they're going to have them no matter what you do and so your job as a goat keeper is really to maintain their parasite load at a level that their bodies can sort of keep up with it. And so, you do have to monitor their body condition. You do have to look for signs like anemia. You do have to watch their poop and see what it looks like to look for clues that their parasite loads might be getting out of control and you do also have to do things to maintain your pasture and you know, just basically keep what they eat healthy for them so that it's not actually making their parasite situation even worse. Have a good vet, super important because with goats, if their body condition declines quickly and you can't diagnose it, you literally probably only have a couple days to solve that problem and if you're late to notice it, then you've already lost those couple of days. So being able to call a large -- they call them large animal vets -- being able to call one and say, "Hey,

these are the symptoms I see and this is what I think it is. What do you think it?" Having someone you can bounce that off of is important.

Goats, even these little mini goats that are basically the size of like your average golden retriever or yellow lab, they're regulated as livestock. So, now some cities and urban areas have made exceptions for the mini goats, but in general, you are going to have to be allowed to have livestock to be able to have goats on your property. If you do want milk, you absolutely have to breed your goats. Now how often you have to breed them kind of depends from goat to goat. I've gotten my goats to the point where I breed them every two years to keep them in milk, but for a lot of goats, you may have to breed annually. Every time you breed, you will have babies and those babies have to go somewhere. So, if you're using goats as a meat source, then, you know, those babies can eventually grow up and become your meat source. If you are not, then you have to think about selling those babies.

Goats are absolutely divas, so they all think they are the best ever, so they frequently have disputes over who is the best goat. So, they tend to -- they'll have these fabulous clashes where they'll like rise up on their hind legs and they'll go crashing into each other. It's so exciting and dramatic to see. Every once in awhile, it might get serious and we have a little bloody head or something like that, but they're actually built for that behavior so it's actually them sort of playing out their own little dramas and it's nothing to worry about. But some goats have horns and some do not. The ones who do not are called polled goats and then a lot of times, people particularly, if they're, you know, going to be raising them for milk goats or raising them as pets, they'll actually have their horns removed and that's called disbudded. And so those, you know, just kind of having horns or no horns is one of those choices you'll want to make early on because having horns or no horned goats together may be problematic. Now, certainly not always, but it's just, you know, a little bit more of a risk.

So, goats cannot really be trained not to be nibblers. It would take you a huge amount of work to do that, but they do require training. If you're going to be using them on the milk stand, you're gonna need to get them used to that. Even if you're not going to be milking them, getting them used to going onto a stand and being sort of trapped in a position makes a lot of the care activities that you have to do like trimming their hooves a whole lot easier.

So, I just have to tell you, I mean every form of livestock has their pros and their cons. I have chickens and ducks and I do pigs sometimes and I have a turkey. And I really, you know, I love all animals, but I have a soft spot in my heart for goats because they are so affectionate. They do attach to you so strongly. They each have, you know, sort of defining personalities. They, you know -- especially if you're milking them on a daily basis, you form a wonderful bond with them, and they feel like members of the family. I will say, you know, I do process them for meat when I have to, but that's not my favorite part about raising goats. I primarily do it, you know, for the milk purposes and the manure purposes, but they're just wonderful animals. They're very easy to want to be around and to want to learn about and so I really, you know, I think if you've got the time, if you've got resources necessary to establish good goat keeping methods and, you know, really sort of feel a bond with them, then goats are a wonderful choice for any homestead.