



## Goats

### Transcript – Milk Production

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Tasha Greer, contributor at The Grow Network, back with you for our final episode in this series on your introduction to raising goats. I think we've covered a lot of information in a short period of time and if you're still here, then I have a good feeling you really are the kind of person that's up for having goats and having the special relationship that you will have with them when you spend every day milking them on the milk stand, taking good care of them and using their milk for products so that you can have good health at home. But there are a few more little details that you are going to have to face as a goat keeper. One of the really sort of complicated questions that I didn't even find sufficient answers for when I first started raising goats was what is the whole milk production cycle? I know goats have babies and then they have milk, but what then? It's kind of complicated because it's going to vary by breed and by nutrition and health and genetic line, but the basic process is once your goats have babies, the first couple of days they're going to be kind of slow on the milk production side because their babies are small. So, nature has this built-in process that goats are going to start with slow milk production and then as the babies start to gain in size, they'll quickly increase their milk production. So, your role is to make sure that the babies get as much milk as they need to be growing well and strong and healthy and then also sneak off as much milk as you can during that process.

So, for me, what I do with my goats when I first have kids, usually the first day I just basically let the kids have all that colostrum. The second day I let the kids have all that colostrum, but I also put my mom on the stand. My little doe will get up there on the stand in the evenings for those that have been nursing their kids all day long and I'll take whatever extra milk she's got that day. That's still got colostrum in it, so I'm not really going to drink it. I might just feed it back to the kids, but I just want to make sure that I get every single drop. And then I'll do that for the next few days, so basically, I've got kids nursing off my doe and then I'm also sneaking off a little bit here and there.

After about a week, then what I start to do is actually separate my doe from her kids for a few hours, and that way I can collect a little bit more milk. I'll basically, in the middle of the day when it's warm and everybody's taking their naps, I'll take my doe and put her in a separate space away from her kids for a couple of hours and then I'll milk her in the evening and then she'll have access to her kids again. After about two weeks, then the baby goats are starting to eat a little bit and so I feel more confident taking more milk at that point. So, at that point, I actually start separating the mom from her babies all night long. So right before I go to bed, I'll go out there and I'll separate the doe from her kids and in the morning when I wake up, I'll go out and milk that doe and I'll get all of that milk that she produced overnight that the kids didn't get to take from her and then she'll get all day with her kids again.

At about two weeks old, you are going to have to make a decision if you have goats that have horns about whether you're going to let them grow those horns or you're going to burn them off. It's not nice. I'm going to be point-blank honest about this. I do not do my own disbudding because I take my goats to my vet who puts them to sleep and then does the disbudding for me while giving them a tetanus shot and also that sedation lasts for a few hours, so they don't have to experience the worst of it. There are people who just sort of build a box, put their kids inside the box and do the disbudding while the kids are awake and that's a practical reality of raising goats without spending more than you have to and so it's a perfectly normal part of raising goat, but I'm a small goat keeper. I get to make slightly different decisions than I would make in a commercial environment, so I take my goats to my vet. And because he's a large animal vet and he understands the economics of raising livestock, he really doesn't charge very much and so I'm happy to pay that for their comfort.

There's also something called polled goats and these are goats that basically have the genes to not have horns and my buck behind us is actually a polled goat. Polling basically means that some of your goats are going to be born without horns and so you won't have to worry about burning them off. There's not a huge amount of scientific research on this, but there was a really old study where polled goats basically produced more hermaphrodites. There also may be some suggestion, I don't know if it's exactly research, but there is some data or correlation to suggest that polled goats have more boys. In my experience, this is absolutely true and that's why I don't do polled to polled in my herd but it does make it a lot easier if you don't have to disbud your goats because that is probably my least favorite part about raising goats. Disbudding, polled, all that kind of stuff, I'll give you a few links in your homework but you'll want to do your research and make your own decisions about that. I will tell you though that a goat with horns is very, very hard to sell. Almost everybody is expecting goats these days to not have horns in one way or another, so it's important to think about if you're going to sell your goats.

Right when they get to be about four to five weeks old and I know that they're eating well and they're growing strong, then I start milking her twice a day. So, I'll do the overnight separation but then I'll also milk her again in the evening and take whatever extra is available then. Now that's just my process. That works really well for me. There are a lot of different ways to approach it, so I really encourage you to look online and find out what other people are doing, but that method has been very effective for me at making sure that my kids are strong and healthy and that they grow well and also that I increase the capacity of my doe for producing milk so that I can get as much as I need long term. Now at about eight weeks, a lot of people will completely wean off their kids and start taking all of that milk for themselves. I personally wait a little while longer and my reason is that at eight weeks of age if you have little boys and they're not going to grow up to become bucks, you are going to need to castrate them. Well, I know that sounds horrible and you know what, I am going to be honest, I'm sure that's not the best day that little male goat ever has, but if you do castrate them, you have a better likelihood of finding them a home as a pet and also, they'll have a good mild personality that will make them really easy to work with.

So, a lot of goat keepers use a very simple method for castrating the males. Basically, you have a tool called an Elastrator and you put a rubber band around that and you wrap that rubber band around the base of your goat's testicles. And you do this at eight weeks of age because by then you can check and feel and make sure both testicles have dropped because you don't ever want to castrate a goat that does not have two testicles that you can feel the two distinct parts because they might have a scrotal hernia if you can't feel both testicles. And if they have a scrotal hernia and you castrate them, you can literally kill your goat from making them septic. If they don't have dropped testicles, then you really need to think about either processing that goat or talking to your vet about a surgical procedure. But this process of banding it's very controversial. I'm not going to lie. In some countries, they've actually outlawed it. I use it because my vet uses it. He still says surgery, particularly because I like to have my goats in warm weather, can result in infections and it's more risky, so he really thinks that banding is the best way to go. But some people have said that's a slow and painful process and that they don't think it's right for the goat.

In my own experience, the goats notice. It takes them about an hour for them to realize, "Oh, my testicles are being deprived of blood flow and oxygen." They tend to roll around a little bit and have visible signs of maybe something like a bellyache for about one to two hours after that and then they start to eat a little bit and drink a little bit. And I tend to do this in the afternoon so that they can get some sleep in there and not have to go through the worst of it while being wide awake. Overnight, by the next morning, they're just walking around like nothing happened. They might be a little bit skittish around you for a few hours after the procedure because they'll realized, "Oh that's when she picked me up and flipped me over and did weird things to me," but I've never had a goat not forgive me for banding them. I've also never had a negative consequence, so for me, that's the easy procedure because it only costs me a few cents for the rubber band once I've got that Elastrator tool. A vet will also do that very inexpensively, so if you go to a large animal vet, they'll offer castration procedures economically.

Girls though, if I think that they have the potential to become dairy goats, I'll usually leave my little doelings with their moms for 12 weeks minimum and that's really because I want them to grow up strong. So, I milk twice a day as I

mentioned before, I set my own schedule. You will certainly get more production if you milk three times a day or four times a day, but the reality is most people don't go to that trouble. It's very common for people just to milk twice a day. If you want the best production, you'll separate it by 12 hours that way it's a continuous demand on your goat's body, but for most of us backyard goat keepers that's not realistic, so we make the schedule that works for us. I do highly recommend though that your schedule is consistent because goats are very susceptible to stress particularly dairy goats; they're a lot more sensitive than meat goats. If you don't milk them, then they'll be getting heavy with milk and they'll be wondering what's going on, they'll start to feel uncomfortable, their stress levels will go up and their milk production will go down. So even if you don't milk 12 hours apart, having a set schedule will really keep the production at a higher level than if your goats are in this stress, release, stress, release kind of cycle when they don't know when they're going to be milk. Obviously, those are your choices, but that's just my recommendation if productivity and stress-free, relaxed, healthy goats is your goal.

Processing a goat is probably on the easy side things, but if you've processed any kind of animal, it's the same basic procedure. You want a clean kill so for goats, like pigs, I will usually shoot them in the head first and then I will cut their necks to bleed them out. You're going to skin it because you have to get all that hide off and then you're basically going to remove the intestines and all of the organs and things like that and then you can cut it up as you would any other animal. Being able to emergency process a goat and make good use of it is probably something you should think about as a responsible goat keeper. If you're a vegetarian and you just don't want to eat meat, then you could use this as cat or dog food.