

BILLY DOESN'T REALLY SWALLOW TIN!



A goat information booklet by
Debra Wilson of Billy-Bob's Boers.

This book is great for children and those who only think they know all about goats!

You may be surprised what you learn!

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Debra Wilson, with her family, has kept goats for 13 years as of 2005. While this is not to offer any medical advice, it is to give a basic overview of the goat and it's interesting uses!

BILLIES & NANNIES? OH MY!

Let's start at the beginning! There are male, and female goats. The male goat is not, as commonly thought, called a billy. It is not a billy-goat either!

I had no idea what a billy-goat was until I had a friend ask a few kids, 8 or 9 years old, what a billy-goat was. They told her it was a goat with a beard! Wow!

A male goat is called a buck. There are buck goats, buck deer, & buck rabbits. Bucks have longer hair, and often have thick, heavy beards too!

A female goat is called a doe. That's also the same as a deer or a rabbit. They can have beards too, but they usually aren't as long and thick as a buck's!

When a male goat is castrated, it is called a wether. Once the flood of male hormones have left the goat's body, they become more doe-like in appearance. They will not be as hairy.

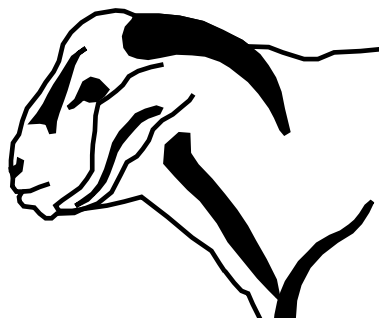
Baby goats are called kids. A young female is called a doeling, and a young male that has not been wethered is called a buckling. A buck can be wethered at any time in his life, but it is most often done between 2 and 10 weeks of age.

Castration can be done several ways. The most common way is by elastration. A tool very similar to a pair of pliers is used to stretch a special very strong rubber band around the base of the scrotum. The pliers are removed, leaving the band behind. It slowly cuts off the blood circulation, and after a few weeks, the testicles fall off in a hard, dry lump.

The baby boys barely notice if it is done very young, but as they get older, it becomes more painful. But no matter what we think of it (or they!) It is something that needs to be done! Bucks are also smelly! For whatever reason, nature has chosen to convince our sweet-tempered friends that covering their faces and legs with urine will make them more attractive to the does. Does and wethers do not have an odor any worse than that of a well-kept house dog.

HORNS OR NO HORNS

Now let's talk about horns! Most goats are capable of growing horns. But you've probably seen a lot of goats that don't have horns. There are several reasons for this.



If the goat is a dairy goat, meaning one that has been bred and raised to produce large amounts of milk, the horns have most likely been removed to ensure the safety of the herd.

If it is a meat goat raised by a 4-Her, the horns may have been removed for the same reason, though with safety of the 4-Her in mind rather than the herd.

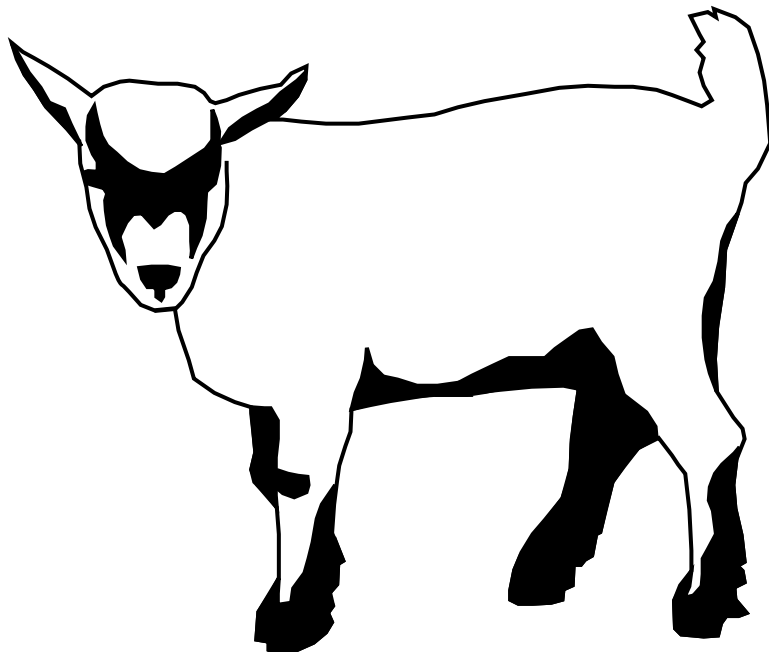
There are several ways the horns can be removed from a goat. The most common, and easiest way, is through a process called disbudding. Disbudding is done at a few days or age, and takes only a few minutes to do. A hot iron is used to quickly burn away the tissues that would make the horn before they really get a chance to grow.

While disbudding sounds like a horribly painful and needless procedure, it is very quick, and the kids quickly forget about it after being returned to their moms.

Horns can also be removed by using the same rubber bands used for wethering goats. They are set way down at the base of the horn, and after several weeks, the horn will fall off. Some people say this is better than disbudding, others do not.

There is more of a risk to the goat due to knocking a loose horn off before it is ready and the animal can bleed to death. A third way a goat can be hornless is to be born naturally polled. Polled means to not have horns, but to be naturally polled means that the horns were not removed through disbudding or banding. Goats that are polled are less common, and have a higher risk of having genetic problems, such as hermaphroditism. That means they may have some parts for both sexes instead of only one.

Polled goats also seem to produce more polled goats. About 50% of all offspring of a polled doe will be polled. You can tell a polled goat from one who's horns have been removed by the way the hair grows on top of its head.



BUT WHAT ARE GOATS FOR?

Goats have many uses, and have been a source of many things all over the world. There are dairy goats, which produce large amounts of milk. From them, we receive milk, cheeses, soaps, butter, and other things.

There are meat goats, which grow very fast and get very heavy, and are then eaten. Goat meat is very tasty and very healthy for you to eat! There are also fiber goats. We get cashmere, mohair, and other wonderful things from them! Just think of where that great soft, warm sweater you have may have come from!

Some goats are trained to carry packs and go on trails with their owners. They will carry a backpack full of supplies for the hike, and walk alongside the person, keeping him or her company as they go.

There are cart goats too! These goats pull small carts much like two-wheeled pony carts, and can pull up to twice their body weight! For a big goat, that can be several hundred pounds! But goats should not be trained to pull any weight at all (or carry!) until they are fully mature!

And there are also show goats. These goats live to be dressed up, bathed, trimmed, and polished, and set before a judge to try and be the best of their breed type!

BILLY DOESN'T SWALLOW TIN?

If goats don't eat tin, clothes off the clothes line, and other assorted garbage, what do they eat? Do they eat paper? Empty soda bottles?

Nope! They actually have a very sensitive stomach, and would get sick from eating that stuff if they tried! They are browsers, so they like to have a lot of things to choose from. They eat grass, brush, tumbleweeds, hay, grain, animal crackers (yes, they love these), and any plant you don't want them to eat.

But many plants and trees are poisonous to goats, so be careful what you have that they can get to. And remember, when giving treats, such as cookies or crackers, use your head and give them only in small amounts!

Goats need to have tough plants to eat for their stomachs to work correctly, and considering they have four stomachs, that's really important! They also need salts and minerals to stay healthy, just like we need calcium and iron for our bodies to stay healthy. Goats need copper in their diets too,

but don't go feeding them any pennies!

HOW BIG ARE THEY?

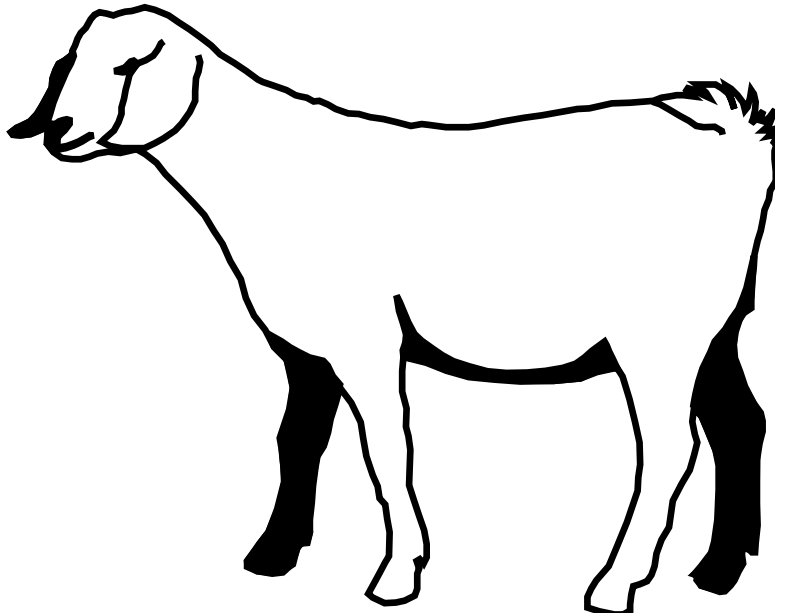
Goats come in lots of sizes and shapes. There are little goats, called Pygmy goats, that are only about as high as your knee! But they are very heavy, and solid! They may weigh up to 80 pounds! These little goats are from Africa, and were first bred for meat. But later, after coming to the United States, they became a pet goat instead.

There are also Nigerian Dwarf goats. These little goats aren't much taller than the Pygmy goat, but they are much finer boned, and delicate looking. They are a dairy goat, and produce lots of milk for their tiny size!

Then there are the big goats. Boer goats are also from Africa, but they are very large. They can gain ten pounds every month for the first year of their lives, and often weigh 300 pounds or more when they are adults. Their fast weight gain has made them popular as a meat goat. They are white with red heads most of the time.

Nubians are a dairy breed. They have very long, drooping ears that hang down to their chins! They can be any color you can think of, and often have beautiful spots!

They are also one of the more talkative breeds. Angoras are medium sized, and have a thick, soft coat called mohair. They are farmed for their coats, and shorn once a year. Shorn means their hair is shaved off and collected. Sometimes Angoras are bred to meat goat breeds.



LaManchas are often the stars of the goat barn at the local fair! These goats don't have an ear that you can see. Just a tiny piece of skin where the ear should be! Many people believe this is caused by cutting the ears off at birth, but that's not true. LaManchas are born without ears. It is a trait they have been bred for over years and years.

There are many, many breeds of goats, and that was only a few. There

are new breeds being made from crosses between existing breeds. Each had it's own purpose and usefulness.

The goat above is very similar to a Nubian, but she is a cross between two breeds, Boer, and Nubian. Both have long, hanging ears.

So Do THEY GET COLD?

So what do those goats do besides eat and play and be goats? Where do they live? What do they need to live in?

Goats do not need to be housed in a barn, and definitely do not need all the comforts of a house like we do. They are fine in a field full of pasture, or a dirt lot with plenty of food and water.

But they do need to be able to get out of the wind and rain! If you have goats, and do not have a barn or shed, you will need to make a three-sided shelter for them with a roof.

Some people build these shelters out of bales of straw and old pallets. And some people use large storage units. Whatever you use for a shelter, be sure it is safe and secure so nothing can fall or colaspe and hurt the goats. Also, make sure they can get plenty of air in there, and it is kept clean.

The goats will really appreciate this because they hate to get wet! If you listen very carefully, you'll hear all about how goats will melt in the rain because they are made out of sugar!

I WANT A GOAT NOW!

Now that you know a little bit about goats, and you think you want one, what do you want it for? Do you want to raise them? Or do you just want a pet. Maybe you want to teach it to go backpacking with you!

What you want it for will help you decide what kind of goat to get. If you want to have fresh milk for your cereal every morning, you won't want a Boer goat or a Pygmy goat. There just won't be enough milk!

But if you wanted to show meat goats, you wouldn't want a LaMancha either. She would give you lots of milk, but wouldn't do very good against meat goats! You would want a Boer or maybe a Spanish or Kiko goat instead.

What you want to do with your goat or goats will also help you decide what sex to get. A wether or buck won't give you any milk, and a doe might not be the ideal meat goat in every case.

Once you decide what you want the goat for, you need to find a place to get a goat from. This might be really easy, or really hard to do.

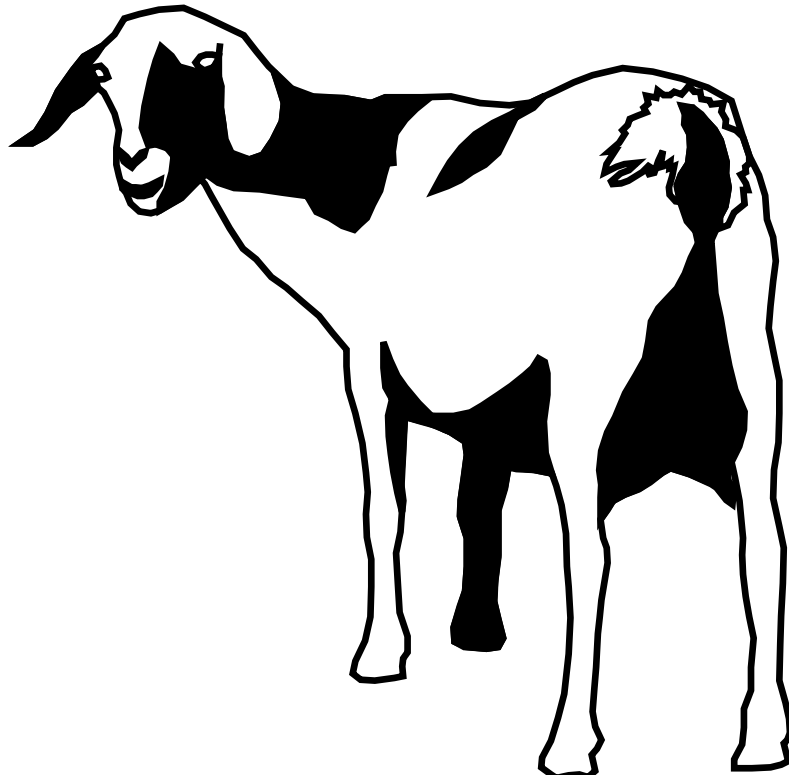
It is best to go to a breeder that you know and is knowledgeable about the goats they raise. It is also very important that the goats you look at be healthy. An inexpensive goat may sound like a great deal, but if it is not in good health, you may soon have a huge vet bill and no goat!

Here are some things to watch for in choosing your new goat. The eyes should be bright and clear, and free from watering. The coat should be soft, and healthy- like your own hair! If the goat you are considering is a baby, or a kid, how old is it? If it has been weaned from milk (is no longer drinking milk) then is it eating solid food? If not, will the kid be staying at the farm until it is weaned, or will you be bottle feeding it?

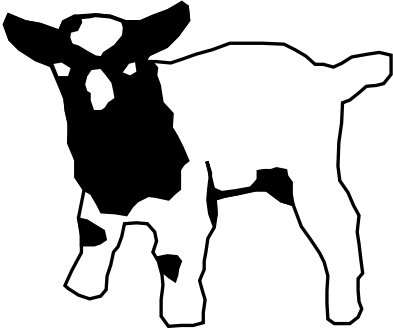
Look around at the other goats too. The way they look is a good way to tell what your goat is like. They are all getting similar care, and may have the same problems or strengths. Does the herd look healthy? Do any of the goats have strange lumps or cuts? Are there any thin ones?

Ask the breeder any questions you may have. They should have no problems answering every question, and explaining why or how they do things. This is a good way to learn as well.

If you are unsure about anything, ask another goat person about it as well as the breeder. And if the deal doesn't seem quite right, hold off. Remember, you are new to this, and need a good start with as few worries as possible! Depending on what you choose to do with your goat, you may have plenty of worries later!



NOW WHAT? I HAVE A GOAT!



Well, what was it you were going to do with it? Oh! You were going to learn what they need besides food, minerals, and water! Well, you're in the right place!

Like your friendly dog, goats need to be wormed regularly. If you live in a warm, wet area, you may need to worm several times a year. In very dry areas, it may only need done once or twice a year. Ask the breeders you visit about worming and what wormers they use, as well as how often.

They also need their hooves trimmed. This is just like clipping your fingernails. Well, almost. Like your nails, when the hooves become too long and overgrown, they start to lose shape and might even crack or break. If they don't get trimmed, they will make it very hard for your goat to walk, and he or she might become lame.

Hoof trimming is not hard to do, and once you learn it, it will seem so easy you'll never understand why it was hard the first time. Try to handle your goats feet and legs to get them used to this. It will save you a lot of time and effort if the goat will stand quietly while you work.

When you trim the hooves, you will use a pair of hoof trimmers made for sheep and goats. They look a bit like a pair of small, hand-held hedge clippers. They are very sharp! Gently clip away the overgrown hoof, doing a little at a time to avoid cutting too far. If you cut too far, they will bleed and may even limp.

There are other things that need done regularly as well, but these are two that you can easily learn and do yourself.

But just as important as these things are, you also need to be sure your goat has good fencing to keep it in, and to keep other things out. This is very important because dogs, coyotes, wild cats, and other predators can easily hurt or kill your goat.

There are several kinds of fencing you can use. Field wire, high-tensile wire, electric wire, and combo panels are all options, depending on whether your goat will be penned or pastured.

WHAT IF SHE HAS BABIES?

If you want to breed your goats, you will have to have a buck, or at least have access to one. Some breeders may allow you to buy the services of their

buck to breed your doe. Others may not. Check around and see what is available in your area. If you only have one or two goats, owning a buck might not be something you need to do right now.

Most does can become pregnant during the summer and fall months. But some breeds, such as Pygmies, Nigerian Dwarves, and Boers, may be bred all year. About every 21 days, the doe will be ready for breeding during this time.

When your doe is pregnant, you may not notice anything different for some time. She will remain pregnant for five months, or 145 to 155 days. After about 3 months, she may begin to gain weight. She may get fatter on the sides, and stick out, or she may carry low in her body and just get “deeper” in appearance.

There is very little you need to do until she kids. Kidding is what it is called when goats give birth. Before the doe kids, she will act differently than usual.

Watch her change how she eats, or how much she eats. She might become friendlier or stay away from you. She will paw at the ground, and make a “nest”. She may be restless and get up and down a lot, or be more talkative than before. After the kids are born, you will need to dip the umbilical cords in 7% Iodine. You can get this from your local feed store. This is to make sure they don't get an infection. When you do this, you can also check to see if they are boys or girls.

Does can have anywhere from 1 to 6 kids at a time, but 2 or 3 are most common. Sometimes they will not have enough milk to feed them all, and you will need to bottle feed the others.

There are a few good substitutes, but goat's milk is the best for them. If you cannot get fresh goats milk, there is a formula using whole cow's milk from your grocery that will work well.

Goat kids are very cute, and fun to play with, but they are also a lot of work! They take up all of your time, and you smell like a goat all the time from handling them. They must be fed often, and cannot be left without milk all day until they are several weeks old.

These are some things to be considered with very young kids. There is always a chance your doe may reject her kids, and you will have to bottle feed.

THE END OF THINGS

So hopefully after reading all this, you've learned something. Maybe just that goats aren't quite what you thought, or maybe that they are exactly what you thought!

I hope that this has been helpful at least to some of you, and if it was, I would appreciate feedback in our guest book, if possible.

If there are any basic areas you feel I need to clarify, please let me know about those too- I want this to be the best it can, while maintaining simple clarity and giving many simple facts about goats, their needs, and basic care.

If you are seeking to buy a goat, or find someone in your area who may be able to help you further with hands on help, please check our links located on our site.

Thanks so much again, and have a great day!

Debra Wilson

Student, goat keeper,
freelance graphic artist,
and web designer

P.S. - If you have
small children, feel
free to let them color in
the goat drawings and
entertain themselves!

