

Containments for Goats

Our topics for this week are:

- **Goat behavior when confined**
- **Special considerations for goat fencing**
- **Pens for newborn kids**

Goats do not act like sheep. Adequate fencing for goats is much more challenging than that for sheep. Pastures for goats should be woven wire with 4 inch, or smaller, square openings to prevent them from putting their heads through the fence and getting caught. Supplemental electric strands may be needed in addition to mesh fencing for goats to keep them from climbing out and serve as an additional deterrent to predators. Temporary fencing can be made with electric wire, cord, tape, or net and step-in plastic or fiberglass posts. Soft strung steel cable with electricity can also be used as temporary fencing. Corner posts for pastures should be at least 6 inches in diameter and braced. Barbed wire fence is inappropriate fencing for small ruminants.

Chicken wire can be buried on the outside to discourage dogs from digging under pen fences. One strand of electric wire at the bottom can aid in discouraging predators from entering pastures but be difficult to keep wet vegetation from touching the wire and draining the charge.

Fencing that is 4 ft high may be sufficient for adult does, but climbers and jumpers, particularly kid goats, may require fencing to be 6 ft. high, or more. Goats will climb on sloping braces at fence corners, so braces should be constructed outside the pen or access to the braces blocked. Water troughs in pens with kids should not have more than 14 inches of water to reduce the risk of a kid falling or jumping in and drowning. Horned and polled goats should not be penned together.

Fencing for bucks and should be 5 to 5½ ft high. An exercise mound of dirt should be provided in the center of the enclosure at least 8 ft way from fencing. The mound should be 5 to 6 ft high. Exercise yards for goats should be 25 square feet per goat to prevent overcrowding. The best fence for goats is woven wire with a barrier strand of electric fence on the inside at goat nose height. Horned goats often get their horns caught in large square mesh fencing, becoming susceptible to injury from their struggling, other goats, and predators. Portable electric net fencing is good for moving dehorned adult goats to new areas of containment, but horned goats and kid goats can get caught in the mesh and should not be contained in electric net fencing. Similarly, hay nets should not be used for feeding hay to kids or horned goats.

Smooth wire fencing for goats should have at least 5 to 7 strands. Lower strands should be 9 inches from the ground and 9 inches from each other. Higher strands can be up to 12 inches apart. Electric fence should have hot lines about 12, 24, and 42 inches high.

Trees must be protected from small ruminants, especially goats. Goats prefer to nibble on the tops of plants and low tree limbs. This helps them reduce the risk of ingesting parasite larvae. Goats will learn to walk on their hind legs and eat all the leaves, limbs, and bark as high as they can reach. If lower limbs are low enough, goats will even climb trees. At least 3 fence posts and mesh wire should be used to create a triangular fence at least 6 inches away from the trunk of young trees in a goat enclosure.

Tethering goats for containment put them at risk for strangling; injured legs, ears, and eyes; attack by predators; and teasing by malicious adults or children. Kid goats should never be tethered for containment, and tethered adult goats should never be left alone. Tethering by a lead to a stake or a running tether on a long line can be done for short periods if supervised and protected from predators. Water, shade, and shelter from adverse weather must be provided. Tethering is appropriate for emergency situations and to periodically permit grazing an area that is not enclosed.

Goats have a strong dislike of rain and mud. If not given a means of avoiding both, their attempts to escape will be greater. Goat sheds can be a 3-sided walk-in shed that is on runners so it can be moved like a sled. The walk-in shed should provide at least 15 square ft of space per goat. Sheds should be located with the opening away from the prevailing wind and in a well-drained area. Mature buck goats during rutting season should be kept in individual pens with an aisle between other bucks.

Does will often allow their desire to be with a herd to override their need to stay with their newborn kid. Small stalls called claiming pens are beneficial for ewes after they have lambed to bond with their newborn lambs in a safe, clean, and dry area for 1 to 3 days before rejoining the flock. Pens for does and kids are called kidding pens. Strangers and dogs should not be permitted near a kidding pen to prevent unnecessary stress to the mothers. Pens can also be used as a hospital stall, if carefully cleaned and disinfected after use. They should be 4 by 6 ft, or larger, depending on the size of the breed.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Goats can jump or climb out of fencing that is adequate for containing sheep.**
- 2. Horned goats can easily trap their horns in wire mesh fencing or hay nets.**
- 3. Does and kids should be kept together in claiming pens 1 to 3 days after kids are born.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 200 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.