

Successfully Breeding Goats

Lockie Gary

Hardee County Extension Director

Producing high quality salable goats requires careful planning. Too often goat raisers simply allow multiple bucks to run with their does throughout the year. In herds like this it is not uncommon to experience up to 50 percent mortality at kidding time. Producers who breed year round do not have a management plan. It is impossible to know when to immunize, deworm, etc. because goats are at different stages of production all year. Some goats are kidding while other does are weaning their kids. Controlled feeding is next to impossible because of the different production cycles among the herd.

What follows is a succinct description of best management practices for goat reproduction in south Florida.

Selection Criteria

Does

1. Purchase from an area with similar climatic conditions.
2. Should weigh a minimum of 55 lbs. or two thirds of adult weight at breeding.
3. Udder should be palpated for size, lumps and other abnormalities. Teats should be uniform in length and large enough for easy milking.
4. Needs good appetite and alert eyes.
5. Do not purchase from small animal auctions or markets. This is where folks dispose of culls.

Bucks

1. One year old breeder buck that has previously successfully mated at least once is desirable.
2. Purchased buck should be accompanied by pedigree and production records.
3. Buck must come from a doe with high twinning rate.
4. Buck must be active and ready to breed in-heat doe.
5. Replace buck as needed to prevent inbreeding.

Care of the Breeding Buck

The breeding buck should always be confined separately but always visible to the does. Bucks are big, strong and smelly. They have some unusual behaviors such as urinating

on their beards. Some folks find this offensive but the does are attracted to this smell. Provide a loafing area with a covered roof. One or two year old bucks can perform 25 to 50 doe services per year, an older buck even more. Hand mating, rather than pasture mating will enable the manager to predict the kidding date. Being near to observe the kidding will allow the herd manager to render assistance if needed and save many kids.

Breeding

Does reach puberty from 4 to 8 months of age depending upon breed and level of nutrition. Does should be at 60-75% of their adult weight at breeding to prevent difficult kidding. Limit yearling buck services to 25 doe services per year. Older bucks can cover up to 75 per year. Buck to doe ratio is 1: 25.

Reproductive Characteristics of Goats

Age of puberty 4 to 8 months

Most goats are seasonal breeders, reacting to shorter days as a cue for breeding.

Cycle length is 18-21 days

Duration of estrus is 2 to 3 days

Standing heat is 12-36 hours.

Gestation period is 150 days (+ or - 5 days)

Best breeding time - daily during estrus

Signs of heat or estrus

1. Mucus discharge from the vulva causing matting of tail hair
2. Uneasiness, constant urination, lack of appetite and bleating
3. Seeks out or stays near the buck and allows herself to be mounted

When breeding, always introduce the doe to the buck. That is, take the in-heat doe away from the herd and present her to the buck. Do not introduce a buck to a herd of pregnant does particularly if the buck has not been used for a long time. He will attempt to breed the does indiscriminately and this can result in mechanical abortion. Two to four breedings (services) during the heat period are sufficient to ensure conception.

Dystocia (kidding problems) is very common in crossing native does with large pure breeds due to the larger size of the unborn kids. Crossbred birth weights will always exceed birth weights of purebreds. Therefore in cross-breeding, large native does should weigh a minimum of 60 lbs. at breeding. Provide human assistance during the kidding process if needed.

Anestrus or failure to come into heat is a common problem particularly with high producing does. The various causes may include vitamin, mineral or nutrient deficiencies, genital track infections and hormone deficiencies. Routine vitamin A, D and E injections to breeding herds contribute to reproductive well being. Several

hormones, like prostaglandin, progesterone sponges and implants and pregnant mare serum (PMS) have been used with varying rates of success to initiate estrus. Routine administration of oxytocin right after kidding and 5 days before weaning aids in faster expulsion of the placenta, uterine fluids and in the rapid involution of the uterus.

At least 50 percent of the breeding problems can be traced to the buck used. Routine check-up of the buck's health condition, especially of the genito-urinary tract should be done. Preputial scraping, blood tests and sperm motility tests may be useful procedures to follow in successful buck management. Always consult an experienced veterinarian to conduct these tests.

The single most constant trait among livestock is their variation!



Photo of Goat Herd taken in Badakhstan by Lockie Gary.