

Ask A Vet: Get Your Goat

Sunday, August 30, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We have recently purchased some land and I have always wanted goats as pets. We have selected Nigerian Dwarf Goats because of their temperament and size. What are some of the routine care items that we need to take care of and should we ask anything of the breeder? We will be picking the goats up when they are 8 weeks old.

Dear Reader,

Congratulations on your soon-to-be expanded family! Goats can make great pets as they are so full of curiosity and are so playful. The main husbandry worries of goats involve housing/fencing, feed, and deworming/vaccinations. For housing, most goats are pretty basic. They need a shelter to get out of the rain and elements and something to climb on. Be cautious when installing a climbing structure for the goats, as they may use it to climb up onto other structures, such as your house, barn, car, etc. They have very little fear when it comes to making death-defying leaps and can amaze you with how far and high they can jump. Fencing needs to be sturdy with openings small enough to prevent them from sticking their heads through. Many people use wood slat fencing as it is sturdy and you can vary the gaps between the planks.

When it comes to feed, I really only suggest quality pasture and/or quality grass hay. Grain can be used as a treat, but frequently is over-fed. Over feeding grain or alfalfa hay leads to fat and unhealthy goats. In the case of male goats (particularly wethers), over feeding grain and alfalfa causes stones to form in their bladder which can lead to blockages.

Worms (intestinal parasites) can be a significant problem in sheep and goat herds. At minimum they should be dewormed 2-3 times per year. Your veterinarian can coach you specifically about the needs of your herd. There is an important set of vaccines that all goats should be given. Goats are fairly sensitive to a group of bacteria called Clostridium. This family includes species such as Perfringens C & D and Tetanus. At minimum, goats should be vaccinated at 10 weeks with a CDT dose with a booster at 16 weeks, then annually. For farms where other species of clostridial bacteria have been found, there is a vaccine that has protection from 8 different species. Ask your veterinarian regarding your specific herd needs.

When talking to the breeder, ask if they are certified free for any diseases. If not, that's ok, just ask if they have had any cases of these diseases: Johne's (pronounced Yo-nees), Sore-mouth, CAE (Caprine Arthritis-Encephalitis), or CL (Caseous Lymphadenitis). If they have, be very cautious in purchasing any of the goats, unless the breeder has described how they have removed it from their herd. Shortly after bringing your goat home, make sure to make an appointment to see your veterinarian, who can answer other questions for you.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman