

NEW YORK STATE 4-H DAIRY GOAT PROJECT FACT SHEET #8

by Dr. tatiana Luisa Stanton
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Cornell University, Ithaca , NY 14853



HOOF TRIMMING

Wild goats travel long distances looking for food and often play on rough rocks and hard ground. All this activity helps keep their hooves somewhat trimmed and cared for. If their hooves do get too long, the tips usually break off naturally. This makes the goat pretty lame for a few days. Too bad for the goat if it encounters a wolf during these lame days (Bye, bye goat!). Tame or domesticated goats count on you to trim their hooves regularly. Otherwise, their hooves will get too long and they may even become lame from the pain. One of your most important duties as your doe's owner is to regularly trim her hooves. Be warned, the first time you trim your goat's hooves, you will probably get exhausted and it may even seem a little scary. But the more practice you get, the easier it becomes. Plan on trimming your goat's hooves about every 6 to 8 weeks. **Remember, the longer you let your goat's hooves get, the harder the job will be.**

Most people use foot rot shears or hoof trimmers to trim goat hooves. You can buy them through livestock supply catalogs and at some feed stores. Pruning shears also work. Pocketknives are pretty dangerous to use since your goat may jump around and you can easily cut yourself. Some people like to use hoof nippers to cut off the tip of the hoof or rasps to file it down. It is generally best for the beginner to invest in shears or trimmers. Even these are very sharp and should be handled with care.

Before you trim your goat, look at the drawings on this page or better yet check out the hooves of a newborn goat kid. See how each hoof of the goat has two toes. The sole of each toe is surrounded by a little wall. This "hoof wall" is what tends to overgrow on most goats. You want to trim this wall down until it is level to the sole and parallel to the foot's hairline. The heels of the hoof and the dewclaws (especially on an older goat) may also develop extra tissue that needs to be trimmed off.

The first time you trim your doe's hooves either put her in her milk stand or position her next to a wall. If she is not locked in a milk stand, have a friend hold on to her or tie her up by a lead rope attached to her collar. Start out with the front leg that is farthest from the wall. This way you can brace her against the wall to hold her still if you need to. Facing your goat's tail, lean down and pick up her front leg at the pastern. Bend her knee so the bottom of her hoof is facing up at you. Try not to twist her leg way out to the side. This will push her off balance and she may squirm a lot trying to get comfortable. Instead, let her knee fold into its natural position. If you want, you can squat down and rest her hoof on your knee. Now,

- 1) with the point of your shears, clean out any dirt that has gotten stuck between her walls and soles;
 - 2) carefully cut off the wall at the tip of her toe so that it is even with her sole;
 - 3) cut away any bent over or excess wall until it is level to the sole all the way around;
 - 4) trim away any rotted out areas between the sole and hoof wall;
 - 5) trim the tissue on her heels until the floor of her hoof is parallel to her hairline (this also stimulates her heels to grow and helps prevent contracted heels);
- 5) if she is an older doe, check her dewclaws and snip them a little if they are getting long.

Great, only three more hooves to go! Some people like to straddle their goat when they reach down to do the back legs. If you are doing a goat whose hooves have been allowed to get very overgrown, you may not be able to cut the wall at the tip of the hoof completely down to the sole without causing the goat to bleed. Instead, trim off small amounts of the tip until you see pink. Stop at that point and don't cut the tip any further. Instead, work on the rest of wall going around the sole. Come back in a week and trim the toe some more. Do this weekly until the hoof looks normal.

If the hoof has a lot of rotten tissue, dip it in hydrogen peroxide or bleach (be careful not to get the bleach on your clothes) when you are done trimming. **Do not use a copper product like Koppertox on a milking doe. It is illegal because it can leave residues in the milk.** If the goat appears to have foot rot or foot scald, set her hoof in a coffee can filled with the proper dilution of zinc sulfate and then isolate her from any other goats or sheep you own.

If the hoof bleeds while you are trimming it, don't panic. Press on the spot where it is bleeding to help the blood clot. You can also sprinkle blood-clotting powder on it (corn starch will work in a pinch). If it is really spurting blood you may want to cauterize the spurting blood vessel with your disbudding iron or pinch it off with some sanitized needlepoint pliers (this rarely, if ever, turns out to be necessary). Give your goat a tetanus booster if her last one has expired.

Suggested Activities

- 1) If you are a beginner, help a friend trim their goat's hooves before tackling your own.*
- 2) If your club feels like you could all use more practice hoof trimming, contact a goat producer with lots of goats and see if your club can trim their goats' hooves. As you are trimming, discuss the differences in leg and feet conformation that you observe among different goats.
- 3) Teach a friend how to trim hooves or prepare a poster explaining how to trim hooves.
- 4) Learn to sharpen shears or trimmers.

* activity is suitable for cloverbuds.