

NEW YORK STATE 4-H MEAT GOAT PROJECT FACT SHEET #5



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FACILITIES FOR YOUR MARKET WETHER

Please note - If you have a meat goat breeding stock project, read NY 4-H Dairy Goat Fact Sheet #5 as well because you will be keeping your goats in the winter and housing newborn goat kids.

Housing - Market wethers are easy to house because you do not own them during the coldest months of the year. In a pinch even a 3 ft square wooden shipping crate or a dog house for a very large dog makes a decent home for one wether. Whatever shelter you use should have a dry, well drained floor and protect the goat from rain and severe winds. It should have easy access to water, be easy to put bedding in and easy to rake up and remove soiled bedding from. Use straw bedding, changed regularly, if your goat's shelter is a doghouse or shipping crate. Locate your goat house far enough from your house that normal goat noises and flies will not bother your family but close enough that you will hopefully hear if your goat gets attacked by dogs.

One of the simplest, cheapest shelters to build is a 3- sided shed. The open side of the shed should face South unless this is the direction your worst storms come from. The roof of the shed should slope away from the open side so rain and snow will slide off to the back rather than making the shed wet at the opening. Locate the shed where there is good drainage. Putting a few inches of gravel on the floor or laying down some old wooden pallets will also help keep the ground dry inside. The dimensions of the shed should provide a minimum of 12 to 15 sq. ft. of floor space per wether assuming he also has a yard to exercise in. For example a shed that is 6 ft long and 4 ft. wide can house two wethers. The shed should be a minimum of 3 ft high at the back and anywhere from 44 inches to 6 ft tall at the front. A taller shed will tend to be draftier, which is an advantage in the summer but a disadvantage in the winter. If you make the shed tall enough for you to stand up (for example 4 ft. at the back and 6 ft at the front), you will be able to tie your goat in it when you are brushing him and trimming his hooves, etc. If the wether is very young or the weather is cold, it is a good idea to board up half the front of the shed to form a 3 1/2 sided shed to give the goat more weather protection.

Larger sheds, barns and garages can also be used for goat housing. The advantages of these larger buildings is that you can often arrange them so that you have one stall to keep your goats in and one stall to store their feed and equipment in. You must make **absolutely sure** your goat can not break into your feed area. Goats do not use common sense and are easily killed by overeating grain if they get into a loose sack of it. Make sure glass windows are not situated where bored goats can reach and break them. Cement floors are not necessary and should be covered with 6 inches of bedding to soak up urine and manure.

Pens - As well as a shed your goat will need a pen to exercise in. Remember, he needs to build a lot of muscle to have a good meat carcass. Goat pens should be easy to keep goats in and dogs out and provide at least 25 sq.ft. of floor space per goat. If possible they should be even larger so that your goats can race around and kick up their heels and really exercise if they want to. One of the simplest but not necessarily cheapest pens to build is to make a 16 ft square pen using 4 - 6 ft.high steel fence posts (driven 1 1/2 ft. deep) and 4 - 16 ft. long metal livestock panels. The panels can be wired to the posts except at one corner where two sided snaps can be used instead to provide a gate

Another ideal fencing for pens is woven net wire fencing at least 42 and preferably 48 inches high. An ideal woven fence has a small mesh size at the bottom and gets larger at the middle and top. Ideally, you want the mesh to be at least 8 inches wide at the top so that your goat can not get his head hung in it. Welded wire fencing tends to break at the welds after a year of goats repeatably standing on it, but can be used if a strand of electric wire is run about 4 inches in from it at the top (use "offset" plastic insulators) to discourage goats from leaning on it. Electric wire fences alone are tricky since at least a few times a year you can count on them malfunctioning and

losing their charge. Some goats are very quick to notice when an electric fence stops working and upon escaping may head straight for a busy road or your family's favorite fruit trees or some very poisonous landscaping plants like yew or rhododendrons.

Pastures - Meat goats are often raised on pastures instead of hay starting around May 15th. If you have a field to let your goat in, you may want to pasture him during the day and bring him back to his pen each night. The perimeter fence of the pasture can be woven net wire fencing at least 44 inches high. You can also use 36 to 42 inch high woven net fencing topped with one or two strands of barbed wire or electric fencing. Barb wire is dangerous around milking goats if they try to jump the fence. You can also make the fence from six strands of 12 1/2 gauge high tensile electric fencing set @ 5, 10, 15, 23, 31 and 39 inches high. The top 5 strands of the electric fence should be hot and the bottom strand grounded. Braces made of steel fence posts or wooden locust posts can be used at the corners with either 5 ft lengths of regular "rebar" or else 3/8 inch wide, 4 ft. tall fiberglass posts for your line posts. Posts can be spaced about 16 -20 feet apart. "Electronet" fencing can also be used to fence small plots. You can use more modest fencing if you plan to only put your goats out when you are home. For example, you can use 3 strands of poly wire or low tensile steel fencing wire or 2 strands of electric fencing tape in combination with fiberglass posts. You will also need to invest in a fence charger that is suitable for the electric fencing you are using. Another option is to make yourself a small, moveable grazing pen by cutting 2 livestock panels in half lengthwise and framing them with 1" x 2"s. These panels can be joined together with 8 two-sided snaps (two at each corner) to form an 8 ft. square pen. The pen will fit two wethers and will need to be moved 2 or 3 times daily. Sturdier, larger grazing modules can be built but will require a tractor or truck to move.

Waterers- 5 gallon plastic buckets work fine. Try to hang the waterer high enough (just a little above his tail) so that your goat can not poop in it. It will save you labor in the summer if you can reach the waterer from the outside of the pen with a hose to fill it. Even so, it will still need to be cleaned out often.

Feed mangers - There are many different designs available for feed mangers. You want a manger that your goat 1) can get his head into easily, 2) not drag hay back out of easily, and 3) not poop or jump in. You will need about 12 to 18 inches of headroom per goat. Mangers should be located where they stay dry. Usually, you need a feed trough that is at least 12 inches wide and 24 inches tall. The walls of it should be solid for the bottom 10 inches. The remainder of the wall should either have "keyhole openings" cut into it for the goat to put his head in or be made of 1" x 2" parallel, vertical slats with 7 inches of head space between them (9 inches for mature buck) angled slightly (@ 30 degree slant). Some folks like to put their mangers up high and have the goat stand on a toe board with his front feet to eat. The thought is that this will strengthen the muscles in his thighs. However, make sure keyhole openings and slats extend low enough that the goat can not choke if he slips off the toe bar. Your goat's salt can be put in one corner of the manger or in special holders available at most feed stores. Wethers can also be fed a complete pelleted feed ration from "self feeders" modeled after dog or poultry self feeders.

Suggested Activities

- 1) If you are planning to get a goat, plan out a pen and shed for it, price the materials at two or more stores, go and buy them and make your goat's housing (or help a friend who is just getting their first goat).
- 2) If you already have a goat and housing, study your hay feeder or self feeder and decide if it has any problems. Visit other goat farms or look at hay feeder plans in books and then build plans for a new feeder based on your observations. Make a list of needed supplies and price them at various stores.
- 3) Get together with your 4 - H club and build the feeder you have planned out and priced.
- 4) Visit goat farms with your club and discuss what you like best about their facilities and why. *
- 5) Draw a picture of your dream goat pen and where you would put the waterer, feeder, and shed. *
- 6) Build a salt block holder out of wood and then paint it with sign paint. *

* activity is suitable for cloverbuds as well.