

# Hoof trimming

Hoof Trimming is an important element of goat husbandry. The type of environment in which the goats live, determines, to a large extent, the amount of hoof care and trimming required.

Goats evolved in a fairly dry and rocky terrain so their natural environments maintained their hooves in good order. The amount of attention that the hooves of a goat requires depends very much upon the type of terrain that it runs on. Goats that live in an area with plenty of rocks will rarely or perhaps never need to have their feet trimmed. In contrast to this, goats living in soft country, especially if their diet is high protein, may need attention every two to three months. The state of the feet tends to be more indicative of husbandry than inheritance but well shaped, low maintenance feet can be hereditary. It is often the goats with black hooves which need little or no hoof trimming.

When trimming goats' feet, firstly it is important to restrain the animal, to prevent injury to both goat and human. Large, quiet animals such as show bucks and dairy does, may be held firmly while they remain standing. Each leg can in turn be raised and the hoof trimmed in the same position as a small horse. Smaller and wilder goats can be restrained in either the shearing position or held on their sides on the ground. Each hoof can then in turn be trimmed according to requirements. Alternatively, a goat handling device which fully restrains the animal, and positions it on its back, is a very convenient way of trimming feet at a comfortable level, while reducing the need for a second person to hold the animal. Large bucks can be successfully handled in a calf branding cradle. With any handling device always ensure that the animal's legs are free from being trapped and injured.



*A hoof in need of trimming – note edge turning onto base of hoof*

It is very important to have sharp and suitable trimming equipment to efficiently and correctly trim goats' hooves. While they can be difficult to obtain, the ideal tool is a pair of footrot (or hoof trimming) shears with long, easy to sharpen blades. Hoof trimming equipment with relatively short, chunky blades makes it awkward for the beginner.

Air operated hoof trimming shears are excellent for trimming large numbers of goats' hooves, especially

when operated on animals restrained in a handling machine. Before using this equipment, however, it is important to practice with the manual shears. The task of hoof trimming is always easier if the goats have relatively soft hooves, so trimming after rain, or standing the goats in a wet yard for a couple of hours prior to trimming, assists the process.

The aim of hoof trimming is to reshape the hoof into its intended form to allow the goat to move freely and correctly. Goats have a cloven hoof which consists of two distinct sections. When trimming a hoof, ensure that the base of the hoof is trimmed to run parallel with the hairline of the top of the hoof. Basically, compare the hoof of the animal that needs attention, to that of a young kid, and aim to trim and sculpture it back to an equivalent shape. The width of the hoof should always be greater than the height of the trimmed hoof, and the two parts should be trimmed to the same level. Boer and Angora goats tend to have a more rubbery type of hoof than do Dairy or Cashmere types, and a considerable amount of this can be trimmed without causing discomfort to the goat. However, cutting the hoof too deeply can cause lameness for some time.

Irregularly and poorly trimmed hooves can cause a great deal of discomfort to goats, causing them to walk incorrectly and exacerbate structural faults. The hooves can grow in a very deformed shape, for example, the outside horn of the hoof continually grows and if allowed to curl under the rubbery base of the hoof, will eventually cause the whole hoof to turn inwards or outwards, creating a shape which may take several trimming efforts to correct.

Once you have established how often most of your goats require hoof trimming, programme this management event into your husbandry schedule. While hoof trimming can be a time consuming task, it is satisfying and very important for the health and welfare of goats which are run in an environment differing greatly to that in which they evolved. happy hoof Trimming.



*A well trimmed hoof – the base feels rubbery when you press on it.*

**From Helen Darlington**

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