

GOATS

AS

PETS

BRITISH GOAT SOCIETY INFORMATION LEAFLET

GOATS AS PETS

Goats are very affectionate, responsive creatures who can make excellent companions, but it is debatable whether they make good pets. Unlike sheep they require shelter so weather-proof housing is necessary. You therefore need to be prepared to attend to your goats whatever the weather – and how much attention is a goat going to get on a cold, wet and windy night in mid-winter?

Goats are herd animals and as a goat cannot have human company 100% of the time it is essential that you have at least two so that they can provide company for each other.

Goats are productive farm animals, and with one or two exceptions can be categorised as dairy, fibre or meat animals. If you want a non-productive animal the choice is limited.

BREEDS FOR PETS

Pygmies. These are small goats which would make good pets, particularly castrated males. They do need good fencing as they can get out of very small spaces, particularly their tiny kids.

Dairy goat. Female dairy goats from low yielding lines can make good pets. However, you must bear in mind that some goats are maiden milkers that is they will come into milk without being mated.

Wethers: This is the term used to describe a castrated male. Dairy goat wethers can be obtained but do remember that male goats, when fully grown, are quite large animals and can be quite boisterous.

Fibre goats: Although these do not need to be milked (unless their kids die or they have surplus milk), their fleece will need extra attention. Angoras are sheared twice a year. The fleece can get very soiled and you may have to watch for lice infestation and fly strike.

Meat goats. Boers can make suitable pets as they are unlikely to come into milk without being mated, and only need routine care of their coats. However, there are not many available in the this country at present. The males are also very large.

Bagots: These goats are known to have existed in this country since the fourteenth century when they were kept mainly for decorative purposes. Today their breeding is supervised by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. They are small long haired goats and tend to be very wild. They are unsuitable as pets except for real enthusiasts with plenty of ground.

THE COST OF YOUR PET

Goats suitable for pets might be given away for nothing or could cost up to £100. However, what you must consider is the cost of housing, fencing and equipment. You will need:

- A dry, draught free, but well ventilated house with adequate space for your two goats
- A well fenced yard or paddock (stock fencing and/or electric fencing is best.)
- Buckets for feed and water
- Hayracks
- Foot trimming shears
- Grooming brushes
- A basic first aid kit including a goat coat
- Pitchfork, shovel, brooms, wheelbarrow
- Plenty of spare time and a willingness to learn

THE COST OF KEEPING YOUR PET

This will vary with the size of your animals. These requirements, which are for a dairy goat, will give you an idea of the quantities required. You would be wise to find out the cost of these items before committing to keeping pet goats.

- Hay. Approx one bale for two goats each week
- Straw. Approx half to one bale a week. Or other suitable bedding material
- Goat mix
- Sugar beet and grass nuts for winter feeding
- Salt licks and mineral supplements

In addition there will be the cost of drugs to de-worm and de-louse your goats, as well as essential vaccinations. You should also allow for the replacement of buckets, collars etc.

HARNESS GOATS

Some people who keep goats as pets decide to get some use out of them and train them to pull small carts or to carry objects as pack animals. For further details see the BGS leaflet on harness goats.



A PET IS FOR LIFE

Just as with any animal, when you buy a goat you are taking on a commitment that lasts for 365 days a year for the rest of that animal's life, which in the case of a goat may be in excess of 10 years.

However, if after reading all the literature available, you still decide that you want two goats as pets, you will come to know the pleasures of keeping this engaging animal. The more time you give to them the more you will be rewarded with affection and companionship. If you join your local goat society (a list of these is available from the BGS) you will also

make new friends as you will find that, on the whole, goatkeepers are very friendly, helpful people.

For further information contact:

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