

Hoof care of sheep and goats

Hoof care is an important aspect of sheep and goat production and management. Hoof disease can affect the health and welfare of sheep and have a negative impact on productivity. Overgrown and diseased hooves are one of the main reasons sheep/goat owners are reported to animal welfare authorities. Hooves should be regularly observed (or checked) for disease and excess growth.

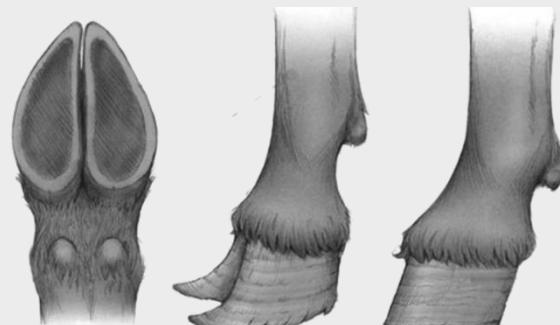
Some sheep/goats may never need their hooves trimmed. Others may require trimming every few months. Once a year hoof trimming is probably most common with sheep/goats. Species, breed, and genetics all affect hoof growth and the need for trimming. Goats usually require more frequent hoof trimming than sheep. Sheep/goats in high rainfall areas usually require more hoof trimming than those on dry, rocky terrain. Feeding and management can impact the need for hoof care. Housed animals usually require more hoof trimming, as do animals on a higher plane of nutrition.



Hoof trimming starts with proper restraint. Sheep are usually tipped on their rumps for hoof trimming. Goats don't sit very well on their rumps but can have their hooves trimmed while they are standing on the ground or on a table or elevated platform. Manual and electric turntables (cradles) can be used to restrain either. A deck chair is a less expensive option for sheep.



A good pair of hoof trimmers (or shears) is needed to trim hooves. A hoof knife (or pick) is also necessary to do a proper job. Electric trimmers are another option. It is a good idea to wear protective gloves when you are trimming hooves.



To trim hooves, start by firmly grasping the hoof and removing any mud, manure, or other debris. Trim excessively long toes. Trim away excess hoof wall until it meets the sole. A pink color means you are getting close to the foot blood supply. Trim the bottom of the hoof as flat as possible and to be at the same angle as the hair line at the top of the hoof. Aim to level the two toes. Trim any pockets. At the same time, avoid overzealous hoof trimming. Animals with excessive or abnormal growth may need several trimmings before their feet are correct. When finished, spray each hoof with a zinc sulfate solution. Disinfect equipment between animals to prevent the spread of disease. Aim to trim hooves when they are softer, after rain or a heavy dew.



Sheep/goats with abnormal or excessive hoof growth should be culled.

