

# Sheep and goats as pets

While most sheep/goats are kept for production purposes (meat, milk, or fiber), some people keep them as pets or companion animals. Even commercial producers sometimes have “pet” sheep/goats intermingled in their flock/herd.



Any sheep or goat can be raised as a pet. It is usually a matter of personal preference or circumstances. Miniature or smaller breeds don't necessarily make better pets, they are just smaller (and eat less) and some places may only allow “mini” breeds. It's best that pets be of the same species and similar size and age. “Bottle” babies” or orphans make good pets because they naturally bond with their care-giver. However, if you start with bottle babies, you need to be aware that they can be challenging to raise and keep healthy, if you don't know what you're doing.

It's recommended that only females or wethers be kept as pets. Intact males can be aggressive and have offensive odors. Polled (naturally hornless) or disbudded animals are also preferred. Horns can cause injury and damage. Hair sheep are a good choice because they don't require shearing and are more resistant to worms.



Sheep and goats are social animals. They should not be kept singly. They are best kept in groups (of their own kind). It takes about five sheep for them to display their natural flocking behavior. In the very least, pets should be kept in pairs of the same species.



Urinary calculi (kidney stones) is a very common problem with pet wethers, especially goats. It is a nutritional problem, usually caused by too much phosphorus in the diet (sometimes, too much calcium). Too much feeding of grain is the usual culprit. The ratio of calcium to phosphorus (in the whole diet) should be at least 2:1. Many other factors contribute to the incidence of urinary calculi, including lack of intake of water, salt, and forage (roughage). Early castration does not cause urinary calculi, but it may make wethers more susceptible if they are improperly fed.

Obesity is another common problem with pet sheep/goats. To prevent pets from getting too fat, don't overfeed them. After their first year, there's really no reason to feed them grain, except as a treat. It may be necessary to restrict the grazing time of some pet sheep/goats. Pasture and/or grass hay and a species-specific mineral mix is all pet sheep/goats really need (unless they are being bred).



Pet sheep and goats have the same basic needs as those kept for production: good nutrition, health, and welfare. They need protection from inclement weather and predators. They need routine monitoring for health, but not regular deworming or overzealous hoof trimming. Vaccination for clostridial diseases and rabies is recommended. Wool sheep and Angora goats need annual shearing.