

# Feeding the Doe

The feeding requirements for does changes based on the stage of production.



Does are often penned with their newborn kids for a few days when kidding occurs in a barn.

Does should be fed at a maintenance level when they are dry and during the first two thirds of their pregnancy. As the doe goes through pregnancy her requirements will begin to increase during the last third of her pregnancy. It is critical to provide adequate nutrition to the doe to produce healthy and vigorous kids and to allow her to produce milk to raise those kids. Grain or high quality pasture can be used to flush the nannies during the breeding season.

## [Early Pregnancy or Maintenance](#)

During early pregnancy does can be fed to maintain their body condition unless they are thin and need to improve their body condition. Pasture or average quality hay is sufficient to meet their nutritional requirements. Be sure to allow the does access to a free choice mineral mix that has been balanced for goats. This will help to ensure that the does remain healthy throughout their pregnancy. Be careful not to overfeed the does. Most animals produce fat externally over their body, however, goats produce fat internally. This can cause problems in late pregnancy for very fat does. They will not be able to eat enough to meet their energy requirements and can develop pregnancy toxemia or pregnancy disease. The body fat and the growing kids will take up so much room that nannies become too full to eat enough to meet their nutritional needs.

## [Late Pregnancy](#)

During the last third of pregnancy, the does need to be monitored more closely. The nutritional requirements during this time increase to provide for the growth of the unborn kids. Does can begin to eat about 1/2 pound of grain a day in addition to the average quality hay that they have been eating. As the doe approaches the last few weeks of pregnancy, you may want to increase the quality of the hay they are eating to prepare them for lactation. Once the doe has her kids, the amount of grain can be adjusted upward to 1 to 2 pounds of grain. Does nursing twins or triplets will require more grain than does nursing a single kid.

## Water

Water is one of the most important nutrients that is needed when raising and feeding any animal. This nutrient is the cheapest and is often the one that is overlooked when evaluating a feeding program. The amount of water needed for pregnant does is less than that needed by lactating does, but it is still crucial. The water needs to be clean and always available. The containers need to be cleaned at least once per week during the winter months and more often during the warm months. This will reduce the amount of algae present in the container. A small amount of disinfectant can be used to clean the containers.

## Minerals

Goats need many minerals for basic body function and to achieve high production. Providing a free choice mineral formulated for goats is recommended. This will supplement the minerals in the grain and forage that the goats will be consuming. Place the minerals in a separate feeder designated for only minerals and be sure to keep the mix available to the goats at all times.

## Pasture

Pasture is an excellent source of nutrients for the goat herd as well as one of the cheapest sources of feed. Pastures should be kept in a “vegetative” state or in other words it should be green and growing for animals to get the most out of the feed source. Throughout the growing season, pastures should be either grazed or clipped to prevent the plants from producing seed heads. As the plant matures it will produce a seed head. As this process occurs, the nutritive value of the plant decreases. Some plants such as orchard grass will rapidly decrease in nutritive value to the point of becoming unacceptable to the animals.

## Hay and Haylage

Most goat producers feed their goats dry hay. Any type of hay can be fed, however, billies have an increased chance of developing urinary calculi when fed alfalfa hay because of the high levels of calcium. The highest quality hays should be fed to young, growing animals and does nursing kids. Lower quality hay can be fed to dry does in the beginning stages of pregnancy. Haylage is also a good forage source for goats. Because haylage is made at an earlier stage of maturity it is often higher in nutritive value than dry hay. Haylage can be substituted for hay in the ration of any of the animals in the goat herd.

Although most silages have molds on them, they are not necessarily a problem. Moldy haylage can be fed to goats in very small quantities: remove any large spots of mold before feeding. Also, keep in mind that wet feeds such as this can also sometimes cause listeriosis or circling disease.

## Grain

Feeding grain is a decision a producer must make relative to his operation. Commercial producers may choose to raise kids entirely on grass and may only feed grain to does just before they kid and while they are nursing kids. Purebred producers often feed grain to kids until they are a year old to maximize growth.

Young kids can be started on a creep feed when they are a few weeks old. Begin with a grain ration at 18% to 20% protein and then decrease to 16% at weaning. Kids should have access to grain in a creep at all times. Supplying feed continuously will help to prevent problems with bloating and overeating disease. Be sure to vaccinate kids with types C & D antitoxin to prevent overeating disease (enterotoxemia). When making any changes to the grain ration, be sure to do it over several days to allow the kids to adjust to the change.

Mature does should not need any grain until the last third of their pregnancy and while they are nursing kids. The exception to this is during flushing. The grain does not have to be very high in protein as the does will need the energy supplied by the grain more than protein. Energy requirements for the doe increase in that last third of pregnancy and will affect the size and vigor of newborn kids as well as milk production. Shelled corn is an inexpensive way to supplement energy in a doe's diet. Keeping energy levels up will also prevent pregnancy toxemia.

No matter what type of ration you feed to your goat herd, keep in mind that visual appraisal is still one of your best methods to determine if the feed is meeting the nutritional needs of the animals. Animals should be in average body condition and relatively healthy. Adjust rations for animals that are over conditioned or under conditioned.