

4H Packgoat Project

The history of goat packing

Goats have been used for centuries to carry loads, starting in places like Iran and Tibet. In the early 1970's John Mionczynski began using goats in his job with the U.S. Forest Service. He eventually started his own outfitting/guiding service using goats and wrote the book "The Packgoat". In 2003 a national organization was formed called the North American Packgoat Association (NAPgA). For more information, or to join this organization the website is <http://www.napga.org/>

What you should look for when choosing your packgoat

When choosing your packgoat project animal you should take into consideration what they will be used for. Some things to think about before getting your project animal are:

Age: Many people choose bottle-fed kids because they will bond to you easily but a dam-raised kid or an older goat will work also. The important thing is that they have been socialized to people and choose to be with you. You don't want a packgoat that runs away from you on the trail!

Gender: Most people choose a wether (castrated male) for a packgoat. Wethers are usually larger than does (females) and with a wether you don't need to worry about their udder being damaged by branches or limbs.

Breed: Your packgoat project can be any breed of goat, purebred or crossbreed. If you're only planning day hikes, even one of the smaller breeds will work for you.

Conformation: It is important for your packgoat to have good conformation because he is a "working goat". He needs to have legs and body that are proportional in length. He needs strong pasterns and strong, good sized hooves. For more information on conformation see the handouts titled "Packgoat Conformation".

Horns: Horns are not allowed on goats at the county fair so it's best to use a hot iron on the horn buds when the goat is a week to 2 weeks old. Some goats do not develop horns. This is called "polled".

Good Health: First, buy your goat from a reputable breeder. This will ensure that they've had a healthy start in life. Second, Learn to care for your goat properly. This would include vaccinations, parasite control, nutrition, and hoof trimming. Third, locate a veterinarian that is familiar with goats and become a client before an emergency comes up.

Attitude: It is important for a packgoat to be bonded to people, willing to experience new things, be smart, quiet, energetic, and well-behaved. Heredity plays a part in a goat's behavior but there are things you can do to make your packgoat project more fun.

Imprinting: In the days and weeks after a kid is born, you should spend a lot of time with them. Snuggle and hug them, play with them, touch them all over, and bottle-feed them. A properly imprinted adult goat will bond to a new owner. It might take a little time, but by interacting with them and feeding them it will happen.

Socializing: Socialization occurs when you take your packgoat places and expose him to a lot of new experiences. Goats are more willing to experience new things when they are young. Take your goat places where there are loud noises, strangers, cars, bikes, dogs, etc. This is also the best time to get your packgoat use to water crossings.

What equipment do I need?

There are two kinds of packs, a soft pack and a cross buck. The soft pack, which can be a dog pack, is great for day hikes and for training young goats. Soft packs can be made or purchased for about \$50 to \$75. The soft pack can only carry up to 10% of body weight and so normally is not used once the goat is grown. You can cause injury to a goat's back if you overload a soft pack. The second type of pack is the cross buck. This is a goat saddle pack that is a miniature of those used for horses, mules, and llamas. With the cross buck you usually also need a saddle pad and panniers (the bags that hang off the cross buck). The crossbuck comes in either wood or aluminum and varies greatly in price. This is the type of pack that can carry 20 to 30%.

How much can a goat carry?

In the above equipment paragraph 20 to 30% weights were stated. This refers to the percent of body weight a goat can carry, for a mature and conditioned goat. On an average, a 150 pound conditioned adult goat could carry 30 to 45 pounds of weight. This includes the weight of the cross buck. A goat is not full-grown until 4 years of age. Don't overload them when they are still growing.

What do I need to consider if I decide to get a goat?

Land -- 100 sq. feet per goat.

Fencing -- 5 feet high, field fencing is usually adequate, though some goats need electric fencing or higher fencing.

Shelter -at least a covered, three sided structure.

Food -- grain, vitamins and minerals, grass hay and/or alfalfa, and browse if possible.

Water -- fresh supply daily.

Health care -- regular worming, yearly vaccination, hoof trimming every 4 to 6 weeks.

Companionship -- unless you have other farm animals or are around a lot, consider two goats as they like company.

Care cost -- one goat will cost on an average about \$20 a month to feed and care for.

Exercise/training -- a hike at least twice a month and conditioning walks at least once to twice a week is a good schedule to go by.

Training your packgoat

Most goats are willing to have a pack on their back with no training at all but there are a lot of other things your packgoat needs to learn when he is young. Your first few lessons will be getting him use to a collar and lead and getting him use to being tied up. Never leave your goat unattended while tied and after a lesson remember to remove your goat's collar when you return him to his pasture. Another useful lesson is teaching him commands such as "Whoa" (when you

want him to stop) and “Up” (when you want him to jump in your truck). As mentioned before, this is also a good time to get your packgoat use to water. Most goats don’t even want to walk through a puddle so they definitely don’t want to cross a stream! Young goats are more receptive to water training than mature goats.

When training, be patient with your goat. Goats don’t learn from being hit. The best training tools are praise and treats. Your goat can tell from the sound of your voice if you are happy or displeased with him. Some good treats are, cut-up fruit and vegetables and peanuts in the shell. Don’t use treats all the time or your goat will come to expect them and that can be annoying.

Packgoat Nutrition

The main part of your packgoats diet should be grass hay, pasture, and browse (trees and brush). They should have access to loose trace mineral salt and baking soda and they should have fresh water in a clean bucket available at all times. Kids need grain and alfalfa for growth but it still needs to be balanced to prevent Urinary Calculi which can be life threatening. To avoid problems with Urinary Calculi be sure the feed program you have your goats on provides them with 2 parts of Calcium to 1 part of Phosphorus. For more information on this please read our club copy of “Diet for Wethers” by Carolyn Eddy.