

Overview

Goats are ruminant herbivores and differ from sheep and cattle, therefore show different feeding behaviours.

Goats are browsers, rather than grazers, meaning that goats prefer to browse up high off the ground and eat a variety of plant species, such as shrubs, bushes, trees (e.g. willows, tree lucerne and poplar), forage crops (e.g. sulla, chicory and plantain) and tall, mature grass - as opposed to short green pasture. Although, they will still eat a lot of grass if that is all that is available to them.

Goats do much better on high fibre diets, low in carbohydrates and high in tannins (a stringent compound that is present in high amounts in bark, wood and certain species of browse plants).

Goats can suffer with lush pasture, high-carbohydrate pellets and grains and a lack of fibre, predisposing them to laminitis, urinary crystals, poor gut motility and digestion, heavy gut worm burdens, and mineral deficiencies.

Diet

A goat's diet should consist of:

Good quality hay - this should be provided year-round unless other tall, mature grass and browse materials are available to fulfil their fibre requirements.



GOATS: A GUIDE TO Nutrition

Browse or forage - this should include tall, mature grass, leaves and branches of other non-poisonous* plant material. Try to feed a variety of different types of forage to keep your goat's life interesting and aim for high-tannin species to help prevent gut worm burdens, but remember that there are some plants that are poisonous to goats. If there is any uncertainty as to whether a plant is safe - do not feed it to your goats.

Concentrates (e.g. grains or pellets) - a quality goat pellet can be considered part of your goat's diet and can help to prevent any mineral or vitamin deficiencies. Take care not to exceed the label recommendations and monitor for lameness as some individuals will react to high carbohydrate content, especially when coupled with lush spring grass.

Wethers castrated under 12 weeks old should avoid feeding concentrates unless essential, as can predispose to urinary blockages.

Water - fresh, clean water should be available at all times for your goats.

Changes to diet

When making changes to your goats' diet, make sure you do so slowly over 2 weeks.

If unsure, contact your Vet about the nutritional requirements of your goats and if they need any additional supplements.

*Check out our 'Guide to Poisonous Plants' available on our website.

*Updated Nov 25