



## Adding Goats to Your Barnyard By: Nicolina Foti

The stillness of the snowy months will hopefully draw to a close. This is a great time to start planning for the hustle and bustle of the warm spring and summer to come. For the homesteader, this is an ideal time to do some research and decide what new things they would like to incorporate into their homestead. Livestock is always a resourceful and fun addition, but this is a decision that cannot be taken lightly, as animals are not a seasonal responsibility.

When it comes to livestock, one of the most popular and most versatile choices are goats. These animals are compact, hardy, and have several uses. For the sake of time and space, let's talk more specifically about Nigerian Dwarf Goats.

Nigerian Dwarfs are known for their even tempers and gentle, playful personalities. Does (females) stand between 16 and 21 inches tall at the withers, and bucks (males) can grow to be 23.5 inches tall at the withers (highest point of their back). These goats weigh between 60 and 80 pounds. They also come in a variety of colors so they can make a homesteader's barnyard speckled with individual color patterns.

These Goats are compact and are winter hardy; an important trait for upstate NY. They are a popular breed for milking. This is because even for their small stature, they produce a great deal of milk, up to two quarts per day. It is with this goat milk you can create goat milk soap, goat cheese, and use it as a substitution in any way regular milk may be used. Goats have several useful products, and one we tend to throw aside literally and figuratively is their manure.



One of the most common uses for goat manure is as a fertilizer. Goat manure can help produce healthier plants and crop yields with the nutrients it deposits. Goats not only produce neater pelletized droppings, but their manure doesn't typically attract insects or burn plants like manure from cows or horses would—this allows goat manure to be added directly to soil among plants. Goat manure is virtually odorless, making it an ideal choice to have in a homesteader's barnyard. Goat manure can also be an excellent additive to a compost pile.

Goats are one of the least labor-intensive livestock choices, but they will still require daily tending. Having goats will require shelter and a fenced-in area. As important as a fenced-in area is to keep them from roaming around, it is just as important for their safety from predators. Their diet consists of fresh, clean water, and all sorts of plant materials: grasses, leaves, hay, twigs from trees, shrubs, and vines. There will also be times goats will need mineral supplements, but this is situation-based.

Goats can provide a homesteader with numerous benefits. Whether it's your garden, cereal bowl, or dry skin, goats can be the answer. They will also bring joy and laughter to your daily barn chores.