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## Preparing Your Goats for the Winter Months Ahead

Autumn is a good time to make sure everything is in tiptop shape for the cold weather that's just around the corner. The preparations you make now can have a long-term impact on the health and comfort of your goats, so here are a few fall tips:

- Even hardy animals like goats need a warm, dry place to get in out of the cold. Now is a good time to make sure your shelter can protect your goats from cold winds, rain and snow as the temperatures drop.
- Remember to replace wet, soiled bedding regularly. Goats need dry bedding in order to stay warm.
- If you're constructing a shelter, keep in mind that goats often prefer to sleep up on a platform instead of at ground level.
- Fresh air is good for goats. At this time of year, you can probably allow your goats to come and go as they please. But this winter, on days when the weather is especially frigid or wet, you may want to keep your goats inside. If you do so, make sure your building has adequate ventilation.
- Goats need access to fresh, clean water at all times. Autumn is the time to think about how you will provide fresh water during freezing weather. A heater in the water tank will help ensure water availability day and night.
- In cartoon shows, goats can exist on a diet of tin cans. But in the real world, nothing could be further from the truth. Goats are actually very particular about what they eat. Goats are primarily browsers, selectively eating a wide variety of shrubs, woody plants, weeds and briars. But drought, land use and the time of year can result in inconsistencies in the quality of forage. As a result, many goats are unable to get enough nutrients from browse alone to meet their needs. To help your goats reach their full potential, it's good to supplement with a high quality feed like Purina® Goat Chow®.
- Even the best nutrition in the world can't compensate for a parasite infestation (worms). Parasites can keep your goats from maintaining a healthy weight or even impair your goats' health. If you haven't already done so, autumn is a good time for you and your veterinarian to establish a regular de-worming program (most goat owners de-worm in spring and autumn). A stool sample can help your veterinarian determine which parasites are causing problems so that you can treat them more effectively.
- Goats become infected with parasites by grazing on pastures seeded with droppings from infected goats. The first signs of infection are lethargy and rough hair coat. Animals that lose weight, have a poor appetite and in many cases diarrhea, may already be in various stages of anemia.
- Check your goat's lips and tongue. If they are pale or white instead of a healthy pink, that can be an indication of anemia caused by a parasite infestation. If a goat appears droopy, lacks energy, loses its appetite or exhibits any outward sign of distress, consult your veterinarian at once.
- Newly purchased goats should be treated for parasites and confined from the herd for at least a week.
- Young kids and adults should be grazed on separate pastures.
- Rotate your de-worming agents to prevent drug resistance. Your veterinarian can advise.
- Another approach to parasite control is prevention. A pasture can become parasite-free if it has been tilled or given prolonged rest at certain times of year or grazed by animals that are unsatisfactory hosts for the parasites in question.

Fall is a great time of year to enjoy your goats. And by following the suggestions above, you can head into the winter months with confidence.