



Preparing Bucks for Breeding

By Jackie Nix

Let's face it. No one likes to handle bucks, myself included. They're big, smelly and strong. For this reason they are often overlooked in herd management. However, the male is vitally important. If a buck is not reproductively sound, the kidding rate will be reduced drastically and profits will suffer. Therefore, in preparation for the breeding season, bucks should receive a little extra attention prior to being turned out with the does including: good nutrition, disease and parasite control, a breeding soundness exam, foot care and a general physical examination.

Nutrition

It is very important that bucks be in good physical condition prior to the breeding season, but not too fat. An active buck with a high libido (sex drive) can literally forget to eat during the breeding season. An adult buck can be left thin but a yearling buck can actually be stunted permanently. A young buck needs nutrients not only for semen production and mating but also for his own body growth. It takes about 60 days for spermatozoa to form and mature inside the buck's reproductive tract. Therefore, it is vital that bucks receive adequate nutrition prior to as well as during the breeding season for optimum performance. If your pasture conditions are not adequate right now, you may want to consider a protein supplement to make sure that bucks are in peak condition going into the breeding season. This is especially true for young, immature bucks that are still growing. There are many commercial protein supplement products available including the **Sweetlix 20% All Natural Protein block** formulated especially for goats. Choose the supplement option that works best for you.

It is also important to point out that proper mineral nutrition is vitally important for both spermatozoa production and for proper immunity. Therefore, to protect your investment in superior genetics, be sure to provide free choice access to a complete mineral supplement designed for the needs of goats, like the **Sweetlix 16:8 Meat Maker mineral**, to ensure that bucks are able to perform at peak capacity.

Disease and Parasite Control

Disease and heavy parasitic infections will also reduce a buck's sexual performance. Here are some steps that you can follow to control disease and parasites.

1. Follow a preventative program for internal and external parasites dictated by your local conditions.
2. Promptly treat any animals showing signs of infection.
3. Isolate new animals and animals returning from shows for a period of 30 days before adding or returning to the herd.
4. Vaccinate bucks for enterotoxemia and tetanus whenever does are vaccinated.

5. Be sure to have a postmortem examination (necropsy) performed for all suspicious deaths. In most states, the Dept. of Agriculture provides a service of free necropsies on livestock in state-run laboratories. Contact the Dept. of Agriculture in your state to receive more information about this service.

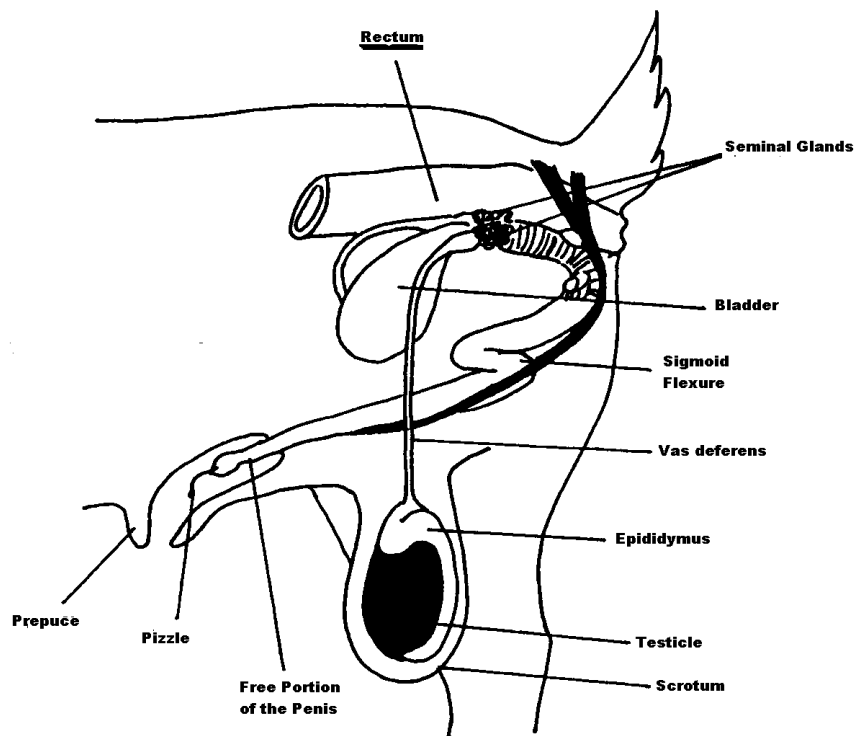
Breeding Soundness Exam

Before going on a long trip you probably give your car a tune-up and make sure that all the important parts are functioning correctly. The same concept applies for your bucks.

You should physically examine all bucks prior to the breeding season each year to make sure that all “important parts” are functioning correctly. Because a buck produces sperm daily throughout his life, his fertility can change from year to year, month to month. Just because a buck was sound a year ago doesn’t mean that he’s sound today!

You can begin by carefully examining the penis and prepuce (sheath). To do this, sit the buck on its rump with its back to you (as if you were going to shear him). Then gently push the prepuce (See Figure 1) down to reveal the penis. If the penis does not appear, gentle forward pressure in the area behind the scrotum will place pressure on the sigmoid flexure (See Figure 1) and thus protrude the penis. When inspecting, make sure that the penis and prepuce are not adhered together. Next check the penis for sores or cuts. Also feel the pizzle (thin process on the end of the penis) to make sure that no urinary stones are lodged there. Next visually feel the testes. Make sure that they are cool to the touch (heat may indicate a possible infection), roughly the same size, firm to the touch (not too hard or soft), and have no unusual lumps. If abnormalities are detected in the testes, the semen should be evaluated by a veterinarian or reproductive physiologist before allowing the buck to breed does.

Figure Figure 1. The reproductive organs of a buck.



Foot Care

Bucks should receive hoof trimming and an examination of their conformation prior to the breeding season. Foot care is very important since problems will hinder the buck from actively seeking out does and mounting them. Bucks who find it painful to walk or mount and will be reluctant to ejaculate even if they do attempt to mount. Possible causes of feet and leg problems include foot rot, overgrown hooves, improper foot trimmings, injury, or CAE.

While you are handling the buck, check his eyes as well. Bucks rely on sight to find does in heat in large pastures, so make sure that the buck's vision is not impaired by cataracts, pink eye, excessive hair or other causes.

In summary, it is of vital importance that bucks be reproductively sound prior to the breeding season. One can prepare bucks for the breeding season with good nutrition; regular health care and frequent foot care. Other precautions include breeding soundness examinations and general physical examinations prior to turning bucks out with does. If forage conditions are poor, you may want to consider protein supplementation to ensure optimum spermatozoa production in your bucks, especially for young, growing bucks. Regardless of forage quality, it is vital to provide a complete mineral supplement at all times to help ensure maximum reproductive performance.

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