

Cool Weather Grooming



Let us show; let us show; let us show!

You know the story: the weather outside is frightful, but you've got someplace to go - the first goat show of the year. You're certain your goats could do well, IF the judge could find them under that thick winter coat. Unfortunately, instead seeing of the sleek, elegant creatures you admire in the summer, you survey a herd of fuzz balls with legs. What to do?

Taking an unkempt, dirty goat into the show ring is an insult to the breed and the judge. Doing nothing is NOT a viable option.

However, there are a couple of things to remember:

1. No win is worth a dead goat.
2. You don't have to body clip your goat to win.

While it is true that nothing else shows off well-blended lines, fine skin and flat ribbing as well as body clipping, the hair is there for a reason. Without it in cold weather, you're risking a sick

goat, or worse. You could make a goat coat for warmth when not showing, but the well-dressed goat is frowned upon in the show ring. With the coat removed, the shivering, cow-hocked micro-camel which faces the morning shadows and the chill, misty wind will challenge the most skilled judge's imagination.

In warmer regions, body clipping with a plucking blade, "F" blade, or a snap-on comb over a regular blade can be a good choice. The goat has some protection from the weather, depending on the length of hair remaining, while showing clean lines. For the northern U.S., the shorter blades, which do a neater job, may not leave enough hair. The longer blades or combs tend to give a "groomed with a weed-whacker" look.

What happens in the northern regions? For the Southeastern Ohio Dairy Goat Association ADGA and AGS Dwarf show, the show rules prominently state, "Please Note: Due to the unpredictable Ohio weather, and with the judge's approval, the goats DO NOT need to be body clipped. A dairy trim is fine.*** We would rather see hairy goats than sick goats ***"

In Ohio, the first weekend of May 1997 was colder and more miserable than most of the winter of 1997-1998 through February. So those who took the warning to heart were wise.

But what is a dairy trim? In its simplest form it refers to removing the hair that would tend to hold dirt or waste and contaminate milk: shaving the udder (or that area on junior does), shortening hair on the belly, flanks, escutcheon, thighs and tail. The result may make milking more sanitary, but once again you have a rather unattractive look, this time of the "haircut with a soup bowl" variety.

What's left? When in doubt, look to the rest of the world. I had often heard that dairy goats in other countries were shown naturally. In pictures the goats look so neat; certainly more grooming than a good bath and brushing had taken place. To confirm my suspicions I posted a question on foreign grooming practices to the Goats List. Glenda Plog of Glenjoy Park Pastoral Company, a Nubian breeder in Kholo, Queensland, Australia, responded with a description which closely matched what we do for early shows.

It is always best to start with a clean goat; clipper blades and scissors last much longer when not dulled with dirt and grit. Much of the dirt can be removed when brushing. I prefer a dog slicker brush (beware cheap models, the wire teeth can damage delicate goat skin). The slicker is very good at removing the excess soft, downy undercoat (cashmere, to you sweater lovers) which gives the goats much of their winter puffball look. If you luck into a warm, sunny day, the goat should be bathed. If weather makes bathing impossible, you can put a couple drops of livestock shampoo or mild dish washing liquid in a spray bottle of water. Mist the goat lightly, then towel dry. Repeat until the towel shows no dirt. Now you are ready to trim.

A small clipper, such as the Oster A-5 or Wahl Stable Pro works better than the larger livestock clipper here. Other helpful tools are straight scissors, barber thinning shears, and a metal dog comb. Except for shaving the udder, sides of tail, around the hooves and inside the ears where

the clipper will be used flat against the skin and against the grain, forget the "proper" way to use the clippers. Turn the clippers on and hold them with the blade pointing at the goat and with the grain of the hair. With a gentle touch, skim the surface and "comb" off the excess hair.

While the actual order of areas clipped is a matter of personal preference, we'll follow the grooming chart from top to bottom and left to right:

- Shave insides of ears. In case you win, you want the judge to be able to see the tattoos. Check for yourself before you get to the show to be sure they are legible and match the registration certificate.
- Remove beard. (On does, that is; buck beards are usually left intact.) A doe beard takes away from that clean, dairy look.
- Blend hair on neck, shorter in front. A long, lean neck is part of dairy character. Starting under the throat to point of shoulder, clip with the grain as described above. Continue parallel columns, using decreased pressure each time to smoothly blend the hair as you work toward the back of the neck. The amount of hair on the neck will determine what you remove. Remember, you want the results to look smooth and clean. Glenda Plog mentions that her Nubians grow a fairly long crest on the back of the neck, so she clips that. Our does don't have excessively long hair on their dorsal lines, so we blend to a point halfway between front and back.
- Shorten hair to emphasize brisket. Long hair on the brisket extends to the forelegs and hides extension of forechest. Follow the natural outline.
- Smooth hair from elbow to knee. Many NDs have longer hair on the outside of the forearm. This can create the illusion that a properly structured animal is out at the elbow.
- Shave hair at coronary band of hooves. Once again, hairy feet take away from a clean look. You can use scissors here to cut off any hair extending over the hoof.
- Shorten hair on flank & belly. Part of the traditional "dairy trim." Use the same procedure as on the neck, going with the grain of the hair, as much as possible.
- Shave udder. Show off the part that defines "dairy," or where it will go. It is not necessary to clip junior does as short.
- Clean up pasterns, shorter hair to front, neaten beneath dewclaws. A plume of hair on the front of the hoof will make a goat appear down in the pastern. Unless the cannon is also shaved, a close clip all over the pastern will make it look weak compared to the rest of the leg.
- Shave sides of tail, NOT top, leave "brush." This is another sanitary issue. Excess hair on the tail collects discharge, especially in recently fresh does. If the top of the tail is clipped there will be a noticeable drop-off from the rump. Most NDs need no help looking steep-rumped. The brush of hair protects the tail's tip and gives the goat a fly shoo'er.
- Remove long hair from escutcheon & back of thigh. This is also part of the "dairy trim" and is important to show height and width in the rear as well as the proper angular outline of incurving thighs.
- Neaten hair from hock to dewclaws. Comb long hair on the back of the legs up and out. Clip or use scissors to make a neat line.

One item not on the chart: many NDs grow slightly longer and thicker hair over the hips. This

makes rumps look steep. If the rest of the back is not clipped, clipping here will look very unnatural. Instead, use a barber's thinning (skip-tooth) shears to remove some of the fullness. Comb the hair against the grain, make a couple of cuts, then comb the hair back down. This can be repeated until the desired effect is reached.

Remember, in all of this, if you take off a little at a time, it is easier to know when to stop. If you take off too much, well, it will grow back eventually. These procedures can also be used to tune up a late summer/early fall haircut.

If this sounds like a lot of work, it IS harder than zipping all the hair off with the clippers. BUT, it is often better for your goat, and (done properly) it looks almost as good. A competent judge will be able to "see" through the remaining hair and should appreciate the consideration you show your animal.