

# Nigerian Dwarf Goats



Colorful, Miniature Dairy Goats  
of West African Origin

[www.ndga.org](http://www.ndga.org)

## ***What's the difference between a Nigerian Dwarf and a Pygmy goat?***

Although they have similar origins, Nigerian Dwarfs and African Pygmies are separate and distinct breeds. Pygmies are bred to be cobby and heavy boned. Nigerian Dwarfs are bred to have the length of body and structure in proportion to their larger dairy goat counterparts. Pygmies are also primarily "agouti", with black, silver and caramel being the most common colors.

### ***Nigerian Dwarf Goat Coloring***

Color is one of the factors that make breeding Nigerian Dwarfs so popular. You can never be sure what color the babies will be until they are born; even then you can't be sure because many times their color may change. Main color families are black, chocolate and gold with virtually every combination imaginable being produced. They can be dalmatian spotted, pinto-patterned, tri-colored or just classy shades of solid jet black, white, chocolate or gold. Buckskin patterns are also common, described by contrasting facial stripes, a "cape" around the shoulders with a coordinating dorsal stripe and leg markings. Brown eyes are most common; however, china blue eyes are also possible.

### ***About Nigerian Dwarfs***

The Nigerian Dwarf is a miniature goat of West African origin. Nigerian Dwarf goats are enjoying a rise in popularity due to their small size and colorful markings. Their small stature means they do not require as much space as their large dairy goat counterparts. Their gentle, friendly personalities make them good companion pets and easy to handle – even small children can be at ease with these little goats. Nigerian Dwarfs are still considered "rare" by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has also approved the Nigerian Dwarf as a livestock dairy goat, which makes them eligible for youth 4-H and FFA projects.

## ***Health Care***

Dwarf goats, like all other breeds, need some basic care for good health and long life. Hooves should be trimmed regularly, about every 4 – 8 weeks or as needed. A properly trimmed hoof should be shaped the same as a kid goats' hoof. Vaccination for tetanus and types C & D enterotoxemia are the basic types given. Check with your local vet for further information or other vaccinations recommended for your area. Worming should be done twice to several times a year. Your vet can suggest a good schedule for your particular herd's needs.

## ***Nigerian Dwarf Shows***

Dwarf shows are growing in popularity and becoming more and more available. Shows are fun, educational and a great way to meet other breeders. They are a place to sell your goats or obtain superior stock for breeding. Show or event information can be obtained through NDGA, local goat clubs and organizations. Can't find a show in your area? Talk to your District Representative on how to put on a show yourself. It is not that hard and lots of fun!



## **Temperament**

Dwarf goats are gentle and loveable. Their calm, even temperament and engaging personalities make them suitable companions for all, including young children in 4-H or FFA. Breeders of other types of goats find their Dwarfs blend in with the rest of their herd and do not need special quarters; just adequate fencing to contain them because of their small size. Many Nigerian Dwarf goats share pastures peacefully with other livestock such as cattle, horses, llamas and donkeys. In fact, they will often improve a pasture by removing brambles, undergrowth, poison ivy, yellow star thistle and wild berry bushes that other livestock will not eat.

## **Accommodations**

Goats should be kept in clean pens free of dampness, drafts and pests like flies and rodents. They also require adequate fencing due to their small size. Nigerian Dwarf goats should not be housed in airtight building; they need to have ventilation for optimum health. For one to just a few goats, many owners find that an oversized doghouse or two does the job. Pens or houses should be kept clean with fresh hay or straw for bedding. Many owners find that providing a few "toys" for their goats provides them with hours of caprine entertainment. Tree stumps, rocks or cable spools are great for "king of the mountain" games and jumping. Just be sure to keep them away from the fence unless you want renegade escapes from your herd loose in your neighborhood!

## **Feeding Dwarf Goats**

Most breeders feed a 12 – 18% protein goat feed or dairy ration. It must not contain urea, as this is toxic to goats. Many breeders give less grain if good pasture and browse are available. Hay or pasture should always be available free choice. Fresh water in clean containers should also be available at all times.

## **Breeding**

Dwarf goats breed year round. Many breeders breed their does three times in two years, giving the doe at least a six-month break. Of course, this is a personal choice for each breeder. The gestation period for a doe is 145 to 153 days. For the most part, Nigerian Dwarfs are a hearty breed with few kidding problems. New babies average about 2 lbs. at birth but grow quickly. Watch out for those little bucks! Those little guys have been known to breed and be fertile as young as 7 weeks of age. Make sure you wean does and bucks separately so this does not happen.

Does can be bred at 7 – 8 months of age if they have reached a good size. Some breeders prefer to wait until they are at least 1 year or older. Dwarf does can have several kids at a time, 3 and 4 being common and sometimes even 6. Dwarfs are generally excellent mothers able to take care of their babies should you leave them to do the raising of the kids. They can also provide a surprising amount of milk for their size if you decide you want your own delicious goat milk.

Bucks are able to be used for service as young as 3 months of age and easily by the time they are 7 or 8 months old. Dwarf bucks are vigorous breeders but are gentle enough to be used for hand breeding or pasture breeding. Both methods are used successfully.



## **"Miniature Dairy Goats"**

A healthy Nigerian Dwarf doe can produce a surprising amount of sweet milk for her small size – up to three quarts per day. In addition, Nigerian Dwarf milk is higher in butterfat (6-10%) and higher in protein content than most other dairy goat breeds. Not all Nigerian Dwarf owners raise their goats for milk. Some just enjoy the pleasure and companionship these little caprines bring to our lives.



### ***Conformation***

A Nigerian Dwarf goat's conformation is similar to that of the larger dairy goat breeds. The parts of the body are in balanced proportion. The nose is straight, although there may be a small break or stop at the level of the eyes. The ears are upright. The coat is soft with short to medium hair. Any color or combination of colors is acceptable.

Maximum height for does is up to 21". Bucks are allowed up to 23". Average weight is about 50 lbs. for does and up to 75 lbs. for bucks. Animals are disqualified from the show ring for being oversized for the breed standard and/or having a curly coat, roman nose, pendulous ears or evidence of myotonia (this is associated with fainting goats).

## **How much do they cost?**

Average cost for registered breeding stock is \$200 - \$500, with champion pedigrees and milk production record animals receiving premium prices. Pet quality stock often costs much less, and wethers (neutered males) can be purchased for around \$100.

## **About NDGA**

The Nigerian Dairy Goat Association (NDGA) is a not-for-profit Registry, Show Sanction and Breed Support organization that is dedicated to development and promotion of the Nigerian Dwarf breed of goat. NDGA was formed in January of 1997 and it is the only Registry and Show Sanctioning organization exclusively for the Nigerian Dwarf breed. NDGA is funded through goat registrations, annual memberships and fundraising activities. We also publish a quarterly journal, Nigerian Goat News in addition to an annual membership directory and an annual Breeder's Calendar. All of these publications are included with membership. Please call, write or email for current membership fees and other available materials. Additional educational information is also available on our website on the internet.

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