



Goat Shearing

Mohair is produced by Angora goats. Cashmere is produced by non-Angora goats. Fibers and shearing techniques differ for the two.

Angora goats are generally sheared twice a year.

Cashmere is either sheared or “combed out” once a year at winter’s end.

Introduction:

Goats may be kept for milk, meat, or fiber (or a combination thereof). Both Angora and Cashmere goats are raised for fiber, but differ in both fiber qualities and methods of fiber harvest. Angora goats produce mohair. Fiber from non-Angora goats is Cashmere. Note that rabbits, not Angora goats, produce Angora fiber.

Best Management Practices:

Angora Goats

Angora goats produce mohair. Most animals produce a relatively coarse outer coat and a finer undercoat. The overcoat will shed rain and the undercoat will provide insulation. Undercoats generally grow in for winter warmth and are shed in the spring. The undercoat provides finer quality fibers. The two types of fiber must be separated at some point in the processing of the fleece. The undercoat dominates, so that relatively little coarse hair will be included in a fleece. However, consideration of the outer, coarser, guard hairs must be included in the overall shearing plan for Angoras. To facilitate fiber sorting, animals with less outer hair may be shorn separately from those with more outer “guard” hair.

Shearing Angora goats

1. Unlike sheep, Angora goats are generally sheared twice a year, once in spring before kidding, and once in fall prior to the breeding season. Exact time of shearing will depend on climate and availability of shelter for shorn animals.
2. Undesirable fibers must be separated from the mohair to obtain a high quality product. These are kemp (hollow, short, coarse (itchy) fibers), and medulated fibers which are also coarser than mohair and are hollow or partially hollow. The amount of kemp and medulated fiber varies by individual and age of animal. Young goats tend to have least kemp and older males the most. It is recommended to shear animals with the highest quality fleece first so bundles contain consistent quality fleece.
3. The Texas A&M University website <http://sanangelo.tamu.edu/Angora/> provides detailed instructions for shearing Angora goats.

Cashmere producing goats

Cashmere comes from the fine underdown produced to varying degree by goats other than Angoras. Cashmere is a finer fiber than mohair. Cashmere production is what defines a Cashmere goat; there is no specific “Cashmere” breed as there is an Angora breed. Most goats produce so little Cashmere as to be commercially insignificant. A productive Cashmere goat may yield 400-500 grams of fiber per year, as little as a tenth of which can be the finer underdown, Cashmere. Cashmere is defined by fiber dimension as being less than 19 microns in diameter and at least 1.25 inches long. Some degree of crimping is desirable, though grading is subjective. Harvesting of Cashmere is quite different from harvesting mohair. Because the coarser guard hairs predominate in a Cashmere goat, the separation of the Cashmere from the guard hair is a highly significant element in Cashmere “harvest”.

Shearing Cashmere goats

1. Cashmere shearing is not as difficult as shearing sheep. Cashmere goats do tend to be more high strung than Angora goats, and thus more difficult to handle than Angora.

2. Cashmere goats produce significant guard hair as well as the finer Cashmere. Generally less than 20% of total fiber production is Cashmere, though this percentage is quite variable according to individual. The guard hairs, the majority of the fleece, will need to be separated from the Cashmere during processing.
3. Cashmere begins growth around the summer solstice, stops growth around the winter solstice, and is shed in late winter to early spring. Shearing should be done before the animals shed naturally, and can be done as soon as temperatures are warm enough that the goats do not suffer from cold. Climate and level of shelter provided determines timing of shearing.
4. For only a few Cashmere goats, try combing out the Cashmere instead of shearing. An advantage to this method is that you will have fewer coarse guard hairs to sort from the fine Cashmere fibers. A disadvantage is that combing will only be effective when the hairs are beginning to loosen naturally, some Cashmere will already have been lost to shedding.

General Shearing tips

1. A clean animal is much easier to shear than is a dirty animal.
2. It is essential that the goat be dry for shearing.
3. Clipping is easier than shearing, especially for a novice.
4. Avoid cutting the same area twice as maximizing fiber length results in higher quality yarn.

Finding a Shearer:

The fiber goat business in Massachusetts is not large and is confined to relatively small herds. If not doing your own shearing, try looking for a sheep shearer (see below).

Resources:

Drummond, Susan. 2005. *Angora Goats the Northern Way* 5th edition.

Massachusetts 4-H at www.mass4h.org has a goat program. There is also a goat camp held at the Cummington Fairgrounds in Cummington, MA. A contact for Massachusetts 4H information is:

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More general information about raising goats may be found in the Mass Agriculture in the Classroom winter 2006 newsletter at:

<http://www.umass.edu/umext/mac/Newsletters/Winter%202006.htm>

Texas A&M University has detailed instructions for shearing Angora goats, as well as information on raising goats.

<http://sanangelo.tamu.edu/Angora/>

The Massachusetts Sheep and Woolcraft Fair information may be found at www.masheepwool.org. The fair features not only sheep, but other fiber-bearers such as goats and is held at the Cummington Fairgrounds in Cummington, MA.

The New South Wales (Australia) Department of Primary Industries has detailed instructions for shearing Cashmere goats at:

http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/178526/goat-shearing.pdf

University of California, Davis

Small Farm Center

One Shields Ave

Davis, CA 95616-8699

For Angora goats:

<http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/pubs/brochures/Angora.html>

For Cashmere goats:

<http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/pubs/brochures/Cashmeregoats.html>

www.sheepusa.org has listings of sheep, alpaca, and llama shearers. Some of these may shear goats as well. Listings are by state, so check surrounding states if you don't come up with someone local.

For more information visit www.umass.edu/cdl

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