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Fastest Growing Breed in the U.S. | Meat Sheep of the Future
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Why Dorper Sheep?

HARDY & ADAPTABLE
Dorper sheep do well in harsh conditions as well as in more intensive operations.

EXCELLENT MATERNAL QUALITIES
Ewes are excellent mothers and heavy milkers. Lambs are vigorous and have high survivability.

LONG BREEDING SEASON
Dorper sheep are non-seasonal or have an extended breeding season. They can easily be managed to produce three lamb crops in two years.

REPRODUCTIVE EFFICIENCY
Dorper sheep are very fertile and prolific. Lambing rates of 180% can be achieved per lambing.

PRE-POTENCY
Dorper sheep cross well with commercial ewes of other breeds and as terminal sires produce fast-growing, muscular lambs.

NON-SELECTIVE GRAZERS
Dorpers are excellent converters of a wide range of forage types, and they excel in grazing or weed control operations.

HEAT & INSECT TOLERANT
Because of their Blackhead Persian origin, Dorpers have natural tolerance to high temperatures and heavy insect populations. They are productive in areas where other breeds barely survive.
A Basic Guide to Raising Sheep
If You Enjoy Eating Lamb, Are Interested In Working With Wool, Or Just Want An Easy-To-Raise Meat Animal, Here’s How To Get Started

Sheep fill an important niche on many homesteads. If you want wool for fiber arts, or if you like spring lamb but can’t find (or afford) it in local markets, you don’t have to be convinced. But if you have a little extra pasture land that’s not enough for a beef cow, or if you’d rather raise and butcher several smaller meat animals than one large one, sheep certainly deserve consideration.

BUYING

A common way to get started with sheep is to buy grade ewes and a purebred ram. But whatever you buy, there are certain things to look for. In the ram, be especially conscious of the condition of the animal’s feet and legs. A ram without good legs and feet will not do his job. Avoid buying rams with questionable semen quality. A major contributing factor to poor reproductive performance is the epididymitis, an infectious disease affecting the epididymitis adherent to the testicle. There are no noticeable visual symptoms. The scrotum must be palpated to detect the swelling and lesions occurring on the epididymitis. There should be two testicles in the scrotum, and neither should be grossly enlarged. The normal testicle has some firmness, but it is not hard. Check the ram’s sheath for lesions of any kind.

Examine the ewe’s udder to make sure there are no signs of mastitis, lumps or hard swelling. The normal udder should be soft and pliable and have two functional halves. Each half should have a teat.

In general, the sheep should be neither over nor underweight. They should move freely, without limping, on well-trimmed feet. They should have sound mouths. (See illustrations.)

Before buying a sheep, observe the eyes and gums for signs of anemia. A healthy sheep will have blood-red gums, and the arteries and membranes around the eye will be red. Sheep with lots of parasites will be anemic, so the gums and blood vessels in the eye will be pale. Severely parasitized sheep may also exhibit bottlejaw—lumps or swelling under the chin.

The above sketch is a front view of the incisors—the temporary teeth—of a 90-day-old lamb. These eight incisors are much smaller than the permanent teeth.
This sketch shows the incisors of a ewe 18 months old. As the animal has aged, the temporary teeth progressively appear longer and narrower. The jaw has grown in size so there is more space between the teeth. (In one study, 6% of the ewes still had all their lamb teeth when they were 18 months old.)

Now the first pair of permanent teeth have erupted, flanked on either side by three lamb teeth. This was the dental appearance for 10% of the 18-month-old ewes.

For 18-month-old ewes, this is the tooth structure for 84% of them. The two permanents here are much larger.

In this dental structure there are four permanents along with the lamb teeth. This was the mouth of 37% of the ewes at 2-1/2 years of age.

In the same 2-1/2-year-old ewes, 57% had incisors like these—six permanents and two lamb teeth (not all shown). Twenty-eight percent of the ewes 3-1/2 years old had similar incisors. And there were even some 4-1/2-year-old ewes—5% of them—that still had this “three-year-old” mouth.

Now here is the full mouth—eight permanent incisors. This mouth was observed in 50% of the ewes 3-1/2-years-old. This was the mouth in 88% of the 4-1/2-year-olds, but curiously, 12% of these ewes had “younger” mouths.

Estimating age beyond this four-year-old mouth is even more of a guessing game. Ewes sold as solid-mouthed have all eight incisors, all close together. Now the condition of the teeth becomes more important to gauging the animal's usefulness.

Incisors like these are called “spreaders”—the teeth have worn from the top and they are narrower than in the full mouth.
This is a “broken mouth”—one or several incisors entirely missing.
When all the incisors are gone the ewe is called a “gummer.”

Because sheep with aged mouths do not do well on the range, western sheepmen remove these older ewes from their breeding flocks. In more productive regions, where feed is plentiful, these older western ewes may produce for a year or two longer. Broken-mouth or gummer ewes require the care of an excellent shepherd if they are to raise another crop of lambs successfully.

**FEEDING**

Raising sheep and conservation-minded land use go hand-in-hand. Lambs are the only farm animals that can be put into choice market grade on pasture alone. But high quality pasture is needed.

A good pasture will carry five ewes and eight lambs per acre for the season (in more northerly regions). Experienced shepherds advise adding 25-50% more acreage to allow management flexibility.

Legume-grass mixtures are recommended for pastures. Normal regrowth periods of alfalfa-grass and trefoil-grass mixtures are 15-20 days. Use this as a guide for rotating your pastures.

Adjust your fenced areas so that your flock will graze in each one for a week or less. Ten ewes and 16 lambs need half an acre for seven days of grazing when forage is 10 inches high. Sheep produce the most pounds per acre on forage that is six inches high. Electric fences can be used to divide pastures into sections.

Eight of the 15 minerals sheep require are supplied when trace mineralized salt is offered free choice. Keep in mind that sheep are more susceptible to copper toxicity than other livestock are. Check with your local extension agent for recommendations on supplementation in your area. Salt should be offered in loose form rather than blocks. Outside, make sure it’s covered.

In some areas, such as Wisconsin, there is a soil selenium deficiency and it is advised that lambs receive an injection of selenium and vitamin E at two to four days of age.

**ALTERNATIVE RATIONS, PER DAY, FOR EWES IN THE FIRST 4 MONTHS OF PREGNANCY**

- Good quality alfalfa or clover hay, 3-1/2 to 4-1/2 pounds.
- Good quality alfalfa or clover hay, three to four pounds; shredded corn stover or straw, one to 1-1/2 pounds.
- Clover or alfalfa hay, three to four pounds; corn silage, one to two pounds.
- Mixed legume and grass hay, four to five pounds.
- Alfalfa or clover hay, one to two pounds; grass silage, four to eight pounds.
- Good quality, low moisture legume grass silage, five to eight pounds.
- With low protein hay such as grass fed with shredded corn stover or with straw, add a quarter to a half pound of 16% protein dairy mixture during the entire gestation period. Do the same for old or thin ewes, regardless of hay quality.
ICELANDICS
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meat · wool · milk

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For ewes in the last month of pregnancy, some grain should be added, with the forage kept at least one-half legumes. Feed one-half to one pound of grain daily per ewe, keeping in mind that the forage should be of sufficient quality to supply the needed protein.

A sample grain ration, with good quality, half-legume hay, would be either shelled corn or whole oats alone or with a 50-50 mix of ground ear corn to whole oats.

Rams generally do not need grain except before or during the breeding season when they may be fed about one pound of grain mixture daily. They should not be allowed to become fat or slug-gish.

Sheep need one to 1-1/2 gallons of fresh water daily. Water should be kept clean, as water contaminated with sheep manure is a common source of parasite infection.

A popular mix for creep feeding young lambs, starting at two weeks of age even if they are to be finished on pasture is as follows:

Corn, no cob, 68.5 lbs.; oats, 20 lbs.; linseed or soybean meal, 10 lbs.; trace mineralized salt, 0.5 lb.; bonemeal or dicalcium phosphate, 1 lb. Feed high-quality alfalfa hay in a separate rack. Grind the feed at first and feed whole later.

For feeding ewes after lambing, about one pound of grain per head should be fed to those with one lamb and 1-1/2 to 2 lbs. per day to those with twin lambs. After two months of lactation, the ration should be reduced to the ration fed in the month before lambing. Then, when lambs are weaned, the ewe rations should be reduced abruptly. (Sheep experts at the University of Wisconsin advised withholding feed and water for 48 hours, while a Countryside veterinary columnist cautioned against withholding water for more than 24 hours.) After the withdrawal period, feed only a little hay for a week to aid in drying up the ewes.

For artificial rearing of orphan lambs, a number of commercial milk replacers are available. (If you have goat milk, by all means, use that.) Those designed specifically for lambs have a higher fat and protein, and a lower lactose content than calf milk replacers, which lambs often do not do well on. Choose one that contains approximately 30% fat, 20-24% protein, less than 25% lactose, and that will stay suspended in both warm and cold water.

Feeding time is the time for the shepherd to check the flock, observing not only whether the animals are eating well, but also their general condition. Feeders should be cleaned before each feeding. Provide 1-1/2 feet of rack space for each ewe.

One last feeding item: flushing is the process of feeding extra food for several weeks before breeding to get the ewes in prime condition. Recommendations of flushing vary considerably, with some farmers feeding some grain, putting the animals on lush pasture, or providing top-quality hay.

**MANAGEMENT**

General rules of thumb about housing are to allow 15 square feet per ewe with about 300 square feet of lot space. Housing should be well-ventilated because excess moisture contributes to sanitation and health problems. You should have enough single panels to build lambing pens for about 10% of your flock.

Some other general guidelines: Fifteen to 25 ewes can be watered for every foot of perimeter on a tank. A ram lamb can handle 15-25 ewes. A mature ram can handle 35-50 ewes.

Keep records on your sheep. A good record card includes the name, sex, birth date, ear tag number, comments on the birth (single, twin, etc.), the names of the sire and dam, body weights, the date bred, birth weights and sex of lambs, and a space for other comments. There should be a disease record, including space for symptoms and the treatment used. When the animal is removed from the flock, the reason should be noted.
Get ready to fall in love with these impish creatures who have a gentle temperament. Their diminutive size makes them perfect for hobby farms, mini farms or rural homes with smaller acreage but they manage just fine on large farms too. The BABYDOLL Southdown is the perfect choice if you are a spinner too!

For more information about Babydoll Southdown Sheep, the NABSSAR Registry, and the Association, visit the website at:

www.nabssar.org
A Monthly Schedule for Shepherds
(Based On Conditions In Iowa And An Early Lambing Season)

Some of these chores might not apply to homesteaders with very small flocks…but it never hurts to know more than you need to know.

**JANUARY**
- Worm ewes, if they were treated in November or if there is evidence of unthriftness.
- Examine several ewes for ticks. If heavily infested, shear and treat entire flock with CoRai, Delnav, malathion, Korian or toxaphene.
- Observe condition of all ewes daily, checking especially for such health problems as foot rot, abortion, or respiratory infection.
- Vaccinate ewes with Clostridium perfringens type C and D or type D toxoid. Vaccination with the above and in combination with tetanus toxoid is recommended.
- Shear ewes early in the month during a week of moderate weather. An alternative would be to shear face, udder and crotch in preparation for lambing. Trim feet during the handling.
- Pregnancy check all ewes during the latter part of the month (70-100 days post-breeding).

**FEBRUARY**
- This is the peak of the lambing season for many shepherds, so most of the recommendations for the month concern lambing and the practices that follow.
- Treat navels of all newborn lambs with antiseptic from a pressure can, dip navels in a 7% iodine solution, or use plastic umbilical clamps immediately after birth.
- Keep lambing quarters clean and well-bedded. Watch the ewes for indications of mastitis. Treat within 12 hours and keep a record of bad-uddered ewes to be culled.
- Watch for humped backs and stiffness in lambs. Suspect white muscle disease: inject a combination of vitamin E and selenium.
- Open teats on all ewes after lambing and see that all lambs nurse for the first time within one hour. Warm chilled lambs and use a “lamb receiver” if necessary to get warmed colostrums fed to chilled, weak lambs.
- Either eartag or paintbrand ewes and lambs. Develop a plan to save extra lambs.
- Group small numbers of ewes and their lambs together for seven to 10 days before turning them in with large numbers. Separate ewes with singles from those with twins.
- Dock all lambs at two to three days of age. Castrate ram lambs. Some shepherds recommend a tetanus antitoxic be administered at docking and castration.

**MARCH**
- Treat ewes and lambs for ticks and lice four to seven days after shearing, if infested.
- Vaccinate lambs with Clostridium perfringens Type D toxoid, two injections 10-15 days apart.

**APRIL**
- Drench ewes five to 10 days before turning them on pasture. (Change from the product used in the previous treatment.)
- Wean lambs about one week before turning ewes to pasture. Take ewes away from lambs, leaving lambs in familiar surroundings.
- Sort and market obvious cull ewes.
- The Sheepman’s Production Handbook recommends that where problems exist, sheep should be vaccinated as follows: vibrosis (ewes); tetanus (ewes); Type C enterotoxemia (ewes); sore mouth (lambs); and bluetongue (ewes, at least three weeks before breeding).
MAY

- Watch for foot rot in both ewes and lambs. Foot rot is a serious disease of sheep. There is no vaccine. Isolate infected animals from the flock and soak their feet in a copper sulfate foot bath daily for one week. Badly infected animals should be culled.
- Weigh lambs when the oldest lamb is about 120 days of age for selection purposes. Select oldest, heaviest twin ewe lambs as replacements. Separate replacement ewe lambs from market lambs.

JUNE

- Observe lambs for indications of coccidiosis, rectal prolapse or enterotoxemia.
- Treat unthrift market lambs for worms.
- Treat the selected replacement ewe lambs.
- Begin selling lambs that average about 100 pounds. Single ewe and single ram lambs should be marketed first.

JULY

- Rotate pastures.
- Purchase growthy ram or rams based on records as well as visual inspection.
- Shear all rams and replacement ewe lambs early in the month. Sell balance of lamb crop.
- Check ram(s) for epididymitis.

AUGUST

- Drench all ewes and rams for worms in the second week of the month.
- Examine feet on all animals in the flock for foot rot. Trim feet as needed. Isolate purchased animals for three to four weeks before turning in with the flock. (This applies at any time of the year.)
- Consider shearing ewes completely if shorn in December or January. Otherwise, shear crotch and dock area.
- If possible, put rams in close proximity to ewes about August 20.
**SEPTEMBER**

- Fertility test ram by semen collection and evaluation. Observe rams closely for lameness, swollen testicles or anything that would hamper breeding performance.
- Shear rams September 1, leaving brisket wool unshorn for paint marking of ewes.
- Turn rams in with ewes about September 1, nights only.
- Provide rams with feed and shade away from the ewes in the daytime.
- Mark rams each evening and use a new color after 15-16 days.
- Keep breeding records.

**OCTOBER**

- Complete breeding season by October 20; simply keep rams away from ewes.
- Breed ewe lambs starting about mid-October.

**NOVEMBER**

- Drench for worms at time of drylotting for the winter. Use a different product than used at the last treatment.
- Check condition of ewes.
- Repair or replace equipment and fences.
- Cull open older ewes or expose to rams for late lambs.

**DECEMBER**

- Observe flock closely for indication of health problems.
- Plan for lambing.
Health

Following good nutritional practices, providing the necessary immunizations, observing food sanitation, and controlling internal and external parasites will go a long way toward keeping your flock healthy. But a preventive health program requires constant vigilance by the shepherd. Particular care must be taken following periods of stress such as storms, after transporting sheep, or following an abrupt change of feed.

Watch for signs such as labored breathing, a dull, listless condition, a sheep refusing to eat or one that lies down a lot and goes off by itself.

The rectal thermometer is one tool that should be in your barn’s medicine chest. The sheep’s normal temperature ranges from 100.9° to 103.8°F, with the average normal rectal temperature of 102.3°F.

Lambing

Before lambing time, it’s a good idea to line up a veterinarian or someone you know who has had lambing experience, so when you run into a problem you can’t handle you can get help in a hurry.

If a ewe has broken water and has been straining for more than 20-30 minutes and no lamb has appeared, you may have to intervene. Try to notice whether the ewe is tiring to time your intervention.

When you decide to help with the birth, clean the ewe and your hands and arms thoroughly with warm, soapy water, and apply an antiseptic lubricant. Consider using the clean, sterile plastic obstetrical sleeves used by inseminators.

Clean the ewe thoroughly, clipping dirty or excess wool from the area surrounding the external portion of the birth canal before thoroughly washing it. Enter the ewe and try to determine the problem. The normal presentation for a lamb is head and front feet first. The head and feet you find in the canal may not necessarily belong to the same lamb, however. Don’t just start pulling—follow the legs back to the body or bodies to find out which parts go together.

Also, be cautious that the legs are both front legs, not one rear and one front leg. If twins are present, deliver the easiest presentation first.

Large-headed lambs may need lots of lubricant around the head. A lamb that’s stuck at the shoulders may be extracted by gently pulling alternatively on the front legs to reduce the shoulder width. Rotating the lamb about a quarter turn to make full use of the pelvic width usually helps move lambs stuck at the shoulder or locked by the hips.

In all cases, pull down and between the hind legs of the ewe, never straight out. That’s because the lamb is born naturally in a C-shaped arc.

If the legs and head are both back, buttocks presented first, and twins, call a vet. But if no vet is available, try this:

If only the lamb’s tail is felt, it is possible a breech presentation exists. With assistance, the ewe is held up by the hind legs and the lamb pushed forward, the gloved hand is carefully introduced, pulling the flexed hind leg back, then the other leg is positioned similarly. Care should be exercised in not penetrating the lamb bed.

In births where the lamb comes out backward, once the delivery is started it should be completed as quickly as possible because the lamb will try to breathe as soon as the navel cord is pinched or broken. It could suffocate if it takes too long. The lamb’s nostrils should be cleared as soon as it comes out.
## DISEASES OF FEEDLOT LAMBS

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<th>DISEASE</th>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>SIGNS</th>
<th>PREVENTION</th>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coccidiosis</td>
<td>3 to 4 types of coccidia peculiar to sheep</td>
<td>Diarrhea, bloody feces</td>
<td>Lack of sanitation is always the trigger mechanism</td>
<td>Amprolium for both prevention &amp; treatment</td>
<td>May accompany heavy worm parasite load</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmonellosis</td>
<td>Salmonella organisms</td>
<td>Depression, diarrhea, elevated temperature</td>
<td>Sanitation is key</td>
<td>Furoce, tetracycline</td>
<td>Needs lab diagnosis for confirmation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pasteurellosis (pneumonia)</td>
<td>Several organisms including pasteurella</td>
<td>Forced breathing, nasal discharge, elevated temperature</td>
<td>Reduced stress, comfortable environment</td>
<td>Sulfas, antibiotics, furoce in feed &amp; water</td>
<td>Can occur in summer as well as winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterotoxemia (overeating)</td>
<td>Clostridium perfringens, Type D</td>
<td>Sudden death, depression, confusion</td>
<td>Start out on feed slowly. Vaccine immediately when entering lot. Repeat 2 weeks later.</td>
<td>Antibiotics</td>
<td>Often accompanies other diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contagious Ecethyema</td>
<td>Virus</td>
<td>Lesions on lips, muzzle, udder, foot, head</td>
<td>Vaccination</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Can spread to man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polioencephalamicia</td>
<td>Acute thiamine deficiency</td>
<td>Blindness, circling, depression, watery eyes</td>
<td>Thiamine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not due to thiamine deficiency in ration but to improper assimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listeriosis</td>
<td>L. monocytogenes</td>
<td>Circling, facial paralysis, death. Associated with silage</td>
<td>Remove poorly cured silage</td>
<td>High level of antibiotics</td>
<td>No vaccine available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinkeye (Follicular conjunctivitis)</td>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>Watery eyes, hemorrhage appearing on surface</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Antibiotic ointments, high level I feed</td>
<td>Occurs in sheep of all ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinary calculi</td>
<td>Excess dietary phosphate</td>
<td>Distended abdomen, straining, dribbling urine</td>
<td>Balance mineral intake</td>
<td>Increase salt content to 2% of ration</td>
<td>Usually associated with cold weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parasitism</td>
<td>Occurs in all lambs</td>
<td>Diarrhea, anemia, “poor doers,” sudden deaths</td>
<td>Worm all lambs when they enter feedlot</td>
<td>L. tetramazole, thiabendazole</td>
<td>Worm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Country Side Sheep Guide**
Sheep Success

By Nathan Griffith

Filled with great ideas for a profitable Cotswold flock, this book also shows how you can earn more money regardless of breed. See how today’s shepherds are getting up to six times the usual net returns by using long-established — but not widely known — strategies for breeding, growing, and selling. 204 pages

Boost your flock’s profits with any one of the thrifty shepherd skills you’ll find in this book!

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970-392-4419
I especially enjoy reading my issues of COUNTRYSIDE because they feature organic homesteading and an emphasis on our natural way of life, the way farming used to be. I have always felt that plants and animals should be raised as naturally as possible, especially without the use of chemical pesticides that leave residues of poison on food and soil.

One key ingredient to the natural way of life is to pick the right variety of plant or breed of animal that will thrive in your area. Having organically gardened for years in the city, I knew this to be true. I also knew saving the gene pools of some of the oldtime plants and animals gives us more alternatives from which to later breed hybrids. Sometimes that “hybrid vigor” they speak of breeds for one main characteristic, like a large bloom on a rose, a large volume of milk for commercial dairymen, or a large obese lamb at six months old.

My goal in homesteading, now that we finally made it to our farm in Oregon, is to be as self-sufficient as possible and still have time to enjoy life. Here’s what I’ve discovered about sheep raising that has simplified my life and brought me one step closer to a natural way of raising food and fiber.

I picked sheep as my animal to raise because they are little and fairly problem-free if not overcrowded. They work well on a smaller homestead. I picked small sheep (under 24”) because I knew I might be maintaining them myself most of the time. Besides, small feeds a family of four well without everyone getting tired of it before it is used up.

“Small” or “miniature” is also very cute, and in sheep this is a niche market the commercial sheep raiser is never going to fill. I also knew I needed two or three very hardy breeds so I wouldn’t be buying someone else’s problems. I wanted no lambing problems, no foot rot, no sickly critters that had to be coddled for survival.

After sifting through everything I could find about sheep and a bit of trial and error, I have chosen two breeds that fit the bill for me—the Soay sheep and the smaller Southdown, called the “Babydoll”.

Both breeds are generally raised in very small flocks, giving the buyer a better chance at healthy stock. It’s fairly easy to watch three dozen sheep for the slightest limp or a sticker in the eye, but 300 or 3,000? That’s when disease spreads. (When introducing new stock to your farm it is wise to always quarantine the newcomers at least 30 days.) Because of the hardiness of these two old-time breeds, I have been able to raise them pesticide free. They are totally organic pasture fed, without the addition of expensive, poison-sprayed grain. I do supplement with a non-sprayed alfalfa/grass or clover/grass hay in winter.

The Soay sheep in particular have been found to be a gourmet treat when marinated and barbecued like kabobs, or roasted whole in a pit for a holiday feast, as many ethnic groups do. This breed is tender, very low fat and delicious.
The sheep does have a very nice spinning wool, but the lanolin taste found in most lamb is missing from this primitive breed that sheds each year on its own.

Managing parasites, particularly worms, is always a challenge with sheep, and no one wants to medicate if it’s not necessary. I have found that the primitive breeds have a great amount of parasite resistance, and when moved from one pasture to another at regular short intervals, can be raised up to slaughter time without needing worming. Of course, this should be checked regularly with stool samples taken to the vet for evaluation. I know if I do have to worm, my lamb is still so close to naturally raised that it can’t compare to store-bought. Organic wormers are used by some folks but so far tests are too inconclusive to be certain they work. I’ll be testing some of these for my next project.

I live in an area of commercial pear orchards, and I know people have no idea how often and how close to harvest those pears are sprayed with pesticides, and how seldom anyone actually checks up on the orchardists. I can only imagine how often commercial meat producers must medicate their animals, spray for external parasites, use fungicides on hooves, overgrain and add hormones to the meat you’re about to buy and eat.

So the answer? If you’re vegetarian, get hardy sheep so the manure for your plants will not be filled with worming residue. And if you want delicious meat for dinner, get hardy sheep so you know exactly what’s in that meat that tastes so exquisite.

Below is a recipe for unbelievably good lamb kabobs. Even the most doubtful will become a lamb lover if you’ve used a breed with mild-flavored meat.

Recipe

**LAMB KABOBS**

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup soy sauce, teriyaki and Worcestershire sauces combined
- 1/4 cup red wine, or 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 teaspoon lemon pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried minced onion, or 2 teaspoons fresh onion
- 1/2 teaspoon rosemary
- 1/2 teaspoon sage
  (vary with fresh ginger, mustard or bay leaf)

Cut one roast or 3-4 chops into 1” cubes, removing any extra fat. Marinate in above mixture at least three hours, turning meat chunks as needed to thoroughly coat.

Then skewer and barbecue over medium coals, turning once, for about 6 minutes total time. Don’t pack the meat tightly onto skewers as it will cook too unevenly. Meat should be tender and moist when cooked the right length of time.
A sheep cote is a special shelter designed to protect sheep from the elements, predators, and parasites. Its use comes to us from the ancient sheep-keeping regions known as the Levant (the lands bordering the eastern extremity of the Mediterranean Sea) and the land of Colchis (modern “Soviet” Georgia). The county of Gloucestershire, England has a range of hills called Cotswolds; they were named for the sheep cotes dotting the hills in ancient times. Cotswold sheep take their name from the same practice; both they, and middle East methods were brought to the Cotswold region of Britain by Phoenicians when they broke the Milesian grip on Colchis, circa 500 B.C.

Cotes consist of a small penned area, with housing for the sheep. The housing can be tall enough for a grown man to walk in, and windtight on the sides, or it can be low (about three to four feet) with more open, airy sides and just a wall to the prevailing winter winds.

Originally, sheep cotes had walls of stone at least five feet high. Their area depended on the size of the flock, but rarely did they house as many as 200 to 300 adult sheep. A cote of that size would be shared by up to 10 shepherds. They weren’t used in areas of low rainfall unless there was a rainy season. The Levantine rainy season begins early in December and continues until late February or March. Except at that time, Israeli shepherds and sheep left the cotes to “abide in the fields.”

During the time in the sheep cotes, animals were fed stored fodder. What little grass grew inside its fences soon disappeared, and the sheep had to eat the fodder or starve. This broke the cycle of internal parasites.

Stomach worms, the worst parasite of sheep, survive winter by going dormant. Keeping sheep off pastures during early spring allowed the grass to grow taller, allowing the grass-climbing stage of the worm to starve. Even today, sheep kept in dry lots harbor no stomach worms.

Moreover, sheep kept in cotes always look better than those wintered in dark or stuffy barns, or out in grazing paddocks. Constantly inhaling fumes from accumulating wastes and the exhalations of ill animals; lack of sunshine for warmth, vitamins and germ-killing; and lack of daily exercise all hinder barn-kept animals. The constant temptation of short, sweet, winter grass induces paddock-kept sheep to neglect the hay in their feeders except when they are famished: They exercise entirely too much for the meager sustenance they wind up getting. Ewes kept for even just three weeks in a cote show amazing improvement in condition over both conventional winter keeping and during times of summer dearth.

Modern cotes consist of cheap housing coupled with sturdy, dog-proof fences which don’t permit the sheep access to green grass. The system differs from the fold in that the area contained is much smaller, so grazing within the enclosure is discouraged. The best modern cotes are portable, with the shelter portion on skids, wheels, or just knockdown construction. The fence portions can be either portable electric mesh fencing, woven-wire covered wooden or pipe panels, or commercially available galvanized stock panels. Even gates may be used, though they’d be rather expensive. A portable manger is almost essential. I show plans for the best manger design I’ve used in my book Husbandry, The Surest, Cheapest Way to Leisure, Plenty, Prosperity and Contentment.

My Sheep Cotes

My first cotes utilized packing pallets I got free locally, stood on end to form walls. I attached them, using baling twine, to metal fence posts (T-posts) or to six-foot lengths of 3/4 inch rebar (concrete reinforcement rod) driven about two feet into the ground. Across the top I laid cheap reject-grade wood slats, and laid galvanized roofing on that. I used old locust wood fence posts and rocks to anchor the roof from wind.
My cotes utilized an existing fence for the north boundary, and for the north “wall” of the hut portion. To block the wind, we attached a three-foot wide cheap plastic firewood tarpaulin to this wall. For sheepcote boundary fences we used the really narrow spaced “yard & garden” type woven wire attached to metal T-posts. It comes in 47 and 59 inch heights in rolls of 165 feet length, and has one-inch line wire spacing at the bottom.

We have since used—with very good results—common galvanized stock panels (four feet high) attached to T-posts with hay string. Another hut frame is one I made of one-inch galvanized iron pipe. It has runners, and a galvanized metal roof. It is anchored to the cote’s north fence, which allows the attachment of a windbreak there. This also allows runoff water from the roof to go outside the cote. Pick the highest ground in the cote for the house placement.

Outdoor area ought to be between 60 and 90 square feet per head on well-drained ground, somewhat more on wetter land. Smaller areas can be employed if the cotes will be moved when the ground begins getting muddy.

The roofed area needs about eight to 10 square feet per head for ewes and tegs (unbred yearling ewes) until lambing time, when they’ll need about 25 to 30 square feet per ewe with her lambs. That way you can set up individual pens for each ewe so she can bond with her lambs. Our Cotswolds are such good mothers they will allow other lambs to nurse if they don’t get a week or so segregated to form this bond.

Rams are kept in their own sheep cotes away from the ewes. Rams don’t eat as voraciously as ewes, and will get thin over time if they have to compete with them for food. Also, they may fight and fret over the ewes. We keep them in their own cotes, about 30 to 40 feet square for up to a half-dozen rams (we have their permanent sheepcotes on a very well-drained rocky area). They get better feed than our ewes (but less of it) because they are almost never pastured. A ram is half the flock, so never stint them, and keep them parasite-free. Of course, during tupping (breeding season) the rams graze with the ewes.

The Results
Keeping our sheep in cotes has resulted in 15% to 20% less hay consumption. At the same time, we found parasite control much easier and cheaper, not only by breaking the cycle, but by making treatment far easier because of the confinement. With portable cotes, the sheep can be kept on arable land to hugely improve next year’s crops. This used to be called “the golden hoof” effect. The sheep look far better at winter’s end, and lamb birth weights also went up by 10 to 15%.

I don’t know if the system would work for all breeds. We keep Cotswolds, and their historic fence-respecting attitudes make sheepcote management a very easy method.

Best For Small Flocks
Then too, sheep cote management is mostly suitable for small flock owners. True, a loss of a sheep to dogs or parasites here and there hurts those producing hundreds or even thousands of lambs. But it’s far worse to self-supporters and those making hundreds of dollars/ewe annual returns on wool and specialty mutton, like many smallflock Cotswold keepers.
How to Shear a Sheep

An exacting job, but fun!

By Nathan Griffith

If you are learning to shear sheep, always keep in mind the shearer’s two all important goals: First, to relieve the animal from overheating as spring time returns and second, to harvest the wool so as to maximize its worth.

Countryside's sister magazine sheep! regularly presents ways how profit-minded flockmasters sell most or all of their raw wool for $8 to $30 or more per pound. However, nobody gets even one-tenth of these prices by trying to sell poorly-managed fleeces. To get top returns, the fiber you sell must be entirely “full-staple” (no short fribs called “second cuts”) with no vegetable matter (VM) and with the inferior portions removed.

A fleece can go from an $8/lb. “handspinners delight” to a 20¢/lb. (or less) crude commodity, simply by poor handling.

To get the best prices, the fleece must also be kept in one piece, or it may be separated exactly down the center of the back. Either way, buyers can then divide and sort the several parts—neck, shoulders, back, sides, belly, legs, and breech—into their own groups, for their own special uses.

Last but certainly not least, a good job leaves no nicks on the sheep or bruises and scrapes on the shearer.

In order to accomplish these goals, the sheep must be manipulated in such ways as to keep it from struggling to get back on its feet. It is also shorn in a special order or pattern, the result of over 150 years’ development, involving literally billions of sheep. This is the order: (1) Belly and crotch, (2) left hind leg and rump, (3) throat and left side, (4) back and head, and (5) right side.

Preparing, catching and “setting up” the sheep are much more important tasks than most new flockmasters realize. They affect how hard it’s going to be to make a good job of it, plus how fast it’ll be done.

3 Main Tasks in Shearing Sheep:

1. Preparing, catching and “setting up” the sheep to be shorn
2. Shearing the sheep
3. Keeping the wool in top condition in order to bring top dollar

Preparing to Shear

If at all possible, sheep should be penned off their pasture the night before being shorn. This way, the sheep empties its stomach so it lies quietly and comfortably when being shorn. Without doing this,
many sheep will kick and wiggle, due to gas accumulation in their first stomach (rumen). Sheep that have “starved” for 12 hours are also much less likely to urinate or defecate on themselves and on their fleeces. Ideally, the best floor for holding them on would be eight inches or more of corn cobs on dry earth, out of the rain, dew, or sun. In cool weather, it’s best if they’re crowded, so they warm up and the lanolin in their wool softens, helping the shears to glide through the fleece.

Secondly, have a good surface on which to shear. I have shorn various breeds of sheep on grass, on sheets of plywood, on old carpets, on canvas tarpaulins and on wooden-board floors. Overall the plywood (if smooth) has been the most satisfactory. It’s so satisfactory that I went to the trouble of making a treated-plywood platform on treated 2 x 4 runners. It is six feet by four feet in area and is screwed together using ceramic-coated decking screws. It’s not so heavy that I can’t put it into the truck and take it places, and mostly I just tug it around where I need it using a rope attached to its two stainless steel eye screws. Another plus for this platform is that it is rigidly flat, even on pretty unstable ground. In case a sheep urinates, it all runs off quickly rather than pooling up in the low spot and soaking into the wood, as happens on simple plywood sheets.

One oft-overlooked item in preparation is to get the younger sheep ready to be shorn for their first time. Every few days for several weeks before shearing, you can pen up the sheep and practice flipping them over to be shorn. You might even consider clipping off the dungy tags and greasiest locks from around the legs and buttocks. This way, it’s not a shock to them (or you) when you’re ready to do the bigger job. Catching and flipping a sheep can be quite exhausting, especially if you’re not good at it yet.

**Catching & Setting Up**

Select the sheep you wish to shear, slip your forearm around its neck and step behind it. The sheep will attempt to leap away, rising up onto its hind feet, where it will balance nicely against your body with very little effort on your part. Now you can walk backwards with it to your shearing place. Only about 1% of the sheep handled this way will thwart you by lying down. You may have to steer those sheep by lifting their head, steering by holding onto their rump wool and then backing them into place on all fours (a demanding bit of work for you and the sheep).

There are two good ways of setting the sheep up:

1. **Stand facing the sheep’s left shoulder, your left hand holding its head (which is facing to your left).**
2. **Step with your left foot under the sheep to a point just past the far side of the sheep.**
3. **Using your left hand, swing the sheep’s head to its right, facing its butt, at the same time press down hard on the sheep’s rump.**
4. **The sheep will “turn” down, and never know how it got off its feet.**

The other method (which works for me much better on big breeds of sheep than the foregoing) goes like this:

1. **Controlling the sheep’s head with your left arm, stand facing the sheep’s left shoulder.** Now, reach over the sheep, grab its right front leg with your right hand and lift the foot firmly up, until its foreleg is parallel with the ground.
2. **You can now let go of the sheep’s neck with your left hand, and switch hands on the lifted foot.**
3. **Grasp the wool above the sheep’s right hind knee with your right hand.**
4. **Very suddenly lift both of the sheep’s right legs. Its remaining feet go out from under it, and its back and shoulders slide rapidly down your legs for an indelicate but not hurtful landing on its left side.**
5. **Slip your left arm under its neck and swing the sheep up onto its rump.**

These methods take much longer to read than to do.
The Cutting Action Itself

Certain “holds” keep the sheep from gaining its feet and running off. The sheep may struggle, but correctly held, soon resigns itself to being shorn and lies calmly on the board.

Most sheep don’t want to be shorn. They want the wool off, but don’t like the feel of anything “crawling” through their wool. These sensations bother most sheep in the same way as a bug crawling along your skin. They struggle to be free of the “varmint.” Therefore, all movements of the shear through the wool should be positive and decisive.

As you cut off each stroke or strip of wool (known to shearers as a “blow”) if the sheep is positioned right, each new blow adds weight to the shorn part of the fleece, helping it roll out of your way for the next blow. Don’t tug on shorn wool to hold it out of the way while cutting a blow, because it pulls the skin up and into the oncoming blades, resulting in nicks (and skin attached to the wool). Sometimes these nicks are so wicked and long that they’re referred to as “boot laces.”

A lock of wool (see illustration, right), showing the 1/4-inch fiber gap in which the shear tips glide along the skin.

Shears (whether electric “clippers” or handshearing “blades”—their usual names) enter into the open area between the skin and where the wool forms into its fuzzy locks. Above that zone all is a tangle—hard to penetrate.

“Second cuts” devalue a fleece if left in it, because the second cuts become blobs as the wool is prepared for spinning. Those blobs clog up machinery at mills, and also are an annoyance to hand spinners. They must be removed after the fleece has been shorn.

To avoid second cuts, the side of the shear that enters the new, unshorn wool is the side that must stay in contact with the sheep’s skin. The sheep’s rounded body contour holds the other end of the comb a little off the skin. The next blow takes up no short wool left behind in the last blow.

After you’ve shorn a few sheep, you will feel much more at ease about this.

The Shearing Pattern

The following is the most-used shearing pattern in the world. It is known as the Australian Long Blow pattern.

STEP ONE

After you’ve set the sheep on its rump, the belly is shorn first. With blades, the blows run first from the wool-free area inside the sheep’s right hind leg to the wool-free area just beside the sheep’s right fore leg. If using clippers, it’s the same except you start in the clear area under the front leg and move towards the clearing at the hind leg.

Run parallel blows to this, in the same direction, removing all the wool from the sheep’s belly from the breast bone to the udder on a ewe, or to the scrotum on a ram. Be very careful not to in any
way clip any part of the pizzle (penis) on a ram, or the teats on any sheep.

There is sometimes a little wool on the ewe’s udder, clip this carefully, always being very particular not to hurt the teats in any way. There is also nearly always at least a little wool in the area between the sheep’s udder and vulva. This meaty portion of the hind legs is known as the “twist.” We don’t need to clip much of this now, except for perhaps a narrow strip of wool just past the udder. The rest of the twist wool is more easily clipped later, with the ewe lying on its right side.

Shearing the belly, using clippers. (See Photo 1. Shearer is Danny Miller of West Virginia, most photos taken at WV State Fair Shearing Contest.)

After clipping the belly, clip the wool from the insides of the hind legs. On the sheep’s right hind leg, a couple of blows are taken from the hoof to the crotch. On the inside of the left hind leg, the blows start near the crotch and proceed out to the hoof. Always take care here to avoid clipping the hamstring (Achilles’ tendon) and the animal’s teats if they should droop towards the shear.

**STEP TWO**

The next step is to shear the sheep’s left hind leg and its rump.

To do this, the sheep is now turned so that its feet are pointing to the shearer’s right, and its head and front legs are lying against the shearer’s legs. (Always keep the sheep’s front legs from touching the ground or it will fight to try to get up.)

Shearing the crotch (see Photo 2) just past the sheep’s udder, which is being held away from the clippers by the shearer’s left hand.

The shears enter the wool near the sheep’s left hind foot, shearing up the front of the sheep’s thigh, towards its hip. Take another blow right next to it and yet more right around the leg, to clear off the sheep’s left buttock. To straighten out this leg (making the entry of the shears into the wool easier and faster), the shearer’s left hand is mashed against the sheep’s flank right beside its thigh.

The first blow has been taken off the sheep’s left hind leg (Photo 3). Note sheep has been turned sideways.

After the leg is shorn, we shear the twist wool, as far as we can, to the sheep’s right buttock (which is the side lying on the board). The shearer may need to pull the sheep’s leg forward for this, towards its chest.

Shearing the sheep’s buttock (Photo 4) and tail after the thigh. Sheep is leaning against shearer’s legs. Pressure is being applied to the sheep’s flank by shearer’s left hand.

Now the shears may enter from the sheep’s buttock, to clip several short blows going towards the sheep’s left hip, then the tail stub (or the whole tail if docking has been neglected) and over to
the sheep’s other hip. To facilitate all this, including the twist wool, the shearer may pull the sheep’s left hind leg forward, exposing more of the sheep’s buttock.

Kevin Ford, America’s best known hand shearer (and columnist for *sheep*) shears over the rump to the far hip bone (Photo 5). The sheep’s head is barely visible, touching his left elbow.

**STEP THREE**

Leaving the rear end of the sheep for the time being, the shearer turns his attention towards the sheep’s neck area.

Opening the wool up the neck (Photo 6). This is the second blow; the first blow along the center of throat is too narrow to show well in a photo.

To do this, the sheep is set up more or less on its rump again. We avoid making the poor beast sit right on its tail—highly uncomfortable for the sheep, which then fights the shearer making it miserable for him, too.

Shearing the rest of the neck (Photo 7), the shearer’s left elbow steadies the sheep, while his left hand extends its left leg in order to stretch and tighten the skin for a good shearing surface.

Now that the sheep’s wool cloak has been opened, we unzip its collar, starting at the tip of its sternum, and shear a swath right down the center line to the sheep’s chin. We hold the sheep’s head away towards our left, using the left hand, in order to help stretch this skin tight. On several breeds, most notably those of Merino origin, such as Merino, Rambouillet, Columbia, etc., there is a considerable “dewlap” of loose skin here. Shearers will have to use the left elbow to hold the sheep’s head away, while grasping the loose skin with the left hand, and tugging it tight before the shears. A tight surface generally means a clean shear without a lot of nicks or second cuts.

Shear the leg itself.

Once the center blow is shorn (Photo 8), we make another right beside it on the sheep’s left side. Then blows are taken from this opening, around the left side of the sheep’s face and then its head (if
it has wool on its head) and then on down the neck to its shoulder. Each blow goes almost (but not quite) to the sheep’s backbone. There should be at least one to two inches of unshorn wool on this side of the backbone.

The shoulder is also shorn in the position, but not past the shoulder, which is reserved for the next step.

**STEP FOUR**

The sheep must be laid over onto its side for the next stage, in which we clip the part between the already-shorn hind leg and the already-shorn front shoulder.

Taking off the long blows (Photo 9). This step is known as the “long blow” and is the step that gave the Long Blow shearing pattern its name. Before its introduction around 1900, the left side was shorn by taking blows from the belly towards the backbone until the hind leg was reached. Many shearers still use the “short blow” method.

Note that the shearer’s feet must be right up under the sheep’s foreleg and hind leg and the sheep is almost tilted onto its back. This helps discourage struggling, and also helps tighten the skin for the shearer to move over. Several parallel blows take off all the side wool.

**STEP FIVE**

The backbone blows (properly, the Long Blows) start at the area you sheared off between the two hips when you were doing the sheep’s rump. From there they run all the way to the sheep’s head. These blows remove the inch or two on the left side of the sheep’s backbone, then a similar distance—or a little farther—over the backbone.

The shearer’s feet must be moved to do these blows. Some shearers simply tuck their right foot up against the sheep’s buttock, while others step between its hind legs, and then tuck the foot tightly against it.

The back bone long blow (Photo 10) goes from the sheep’s buttock all the way to the head. Note how the wool flops out of the way with this shearing pattern, yet remains in one piece. Either way, the sheep’s head is raised by the shearer’s left hand, and laid against the shearer’s left knee or thigh, to form a sweeping arch that allows the shearer to reach the whole backbone area. Again, the front hooves must not be allowed to gain a footing on the floor.

The more carefully the wool was removed between the sheep’s hips when clipping the rump (Photo 11), the easier the back bone long blow.
STEP SIX

The backbone is cleared of wool all the way to the sheep’s right shoulder blade. Now the shearer steps over the sheep, bunching the wool up against its body. This helps prevent tearing the fleece apart by sliding his foot on it.

The shearer’s left foot remains well under the sheep’s shoulder, while his right foot gets so close that if the sheep struggles, it can’t slide off and get its shoulder to the floor.

The shearer bends the sheep’s head upward, shearing its right cheek and neck all the way down to its chest and shoulder.

Note how the sheep’s head has been turned back through the shearer’s legs as he shears the neck and shoulder of the last side (Photo 12).

STEP SEVEN

The sheep is pulled upward as the shearer steps backward, positioning his feet against, actually under, the sheep.

The sheep has been raised up to free its right foreleg for shearing (Photo 13).

This is the “whipping side,” a term dating from pre-horsedrawn farming days to the oxen era. It was customary for drovers to guide and encourage from the left, but whip on the right side. Many of the most knowledgeable shearers nowadays think this term was given to sheep because the last side is definitely faster to shear than the first side.

As the shearer works his way down the last side of the sheep, he steps back slightly so that more of the sheep’s body becomes available for him to clip. The sheep will then curve its spine inward towards the shearer’s legs, and again loosening the skin and exposing it to danger from nicks. To counteract this tendency, some shearers pull up on the sheep’s right leg, tightening the skin.

The shearer is pulling on the sheep’s right front leg (Photo 14) to tighten the skin surface for the clippers.

Just as was done on the first side, the leg can be straightened out by pressing into the sheep’s flank area with the left hand fist.

Photo 12: Shearing the neck and shoulder of the last side.

Photo 13: Sheep raised up to free right foreleg.

Photo 14: Tightening the skin surface for the clippers.
Here (Photo 15) the shearer presses into the sheep’s flank, just as was done on the first side hind leg.

In shearing the leg and thigh area, it is gratifying to have shorn well over the rump when you sheared the first hind leg.

While shearing the last side buttock (Photo 16), it helps to grasp the loose skin of the flank and pull the loose skin of the rump toward the front, and over the buttock, where it can be seen.

If one doesn’t shear well over the rump as he does the first hind leg, he is very likely to leave a tuft of wool from the backbone, where the clippers will not reach when doing the last side. The historic, if rather indelicate name for this is a “Chinaman” for its slight resemblance to the ancient Chinese queue hairstyle.

Finally, while doing the last leg and remainder of the buttock, it helps for the shearer to grasp the loose skin in front of the leg, and pull, sliding the rump skin forward where it can be shorn more easily.

The last part of the rump is clipped (Photo 17) and the sheep is done!

A top pro shearer shears between about 60 and 300 sheep a day, depending on many factors, but a sheep in under 10 minutes is a good target time. Today’s shearing prices are about $3 to $10 or even more per sheep.

If you’re not going into shearing as a rural profession, you might take a lot longer than that and still save a lot of aggravation in trying to locate a shearer and being ready and present just when some mishap forces him or her to cancel. I know several shearsers who go out, shear a sheep (or several) every day for weeks. This is easier with simpler equipment. With hand shears some shear right in the field, on clean grass. They shear their whole flock, never get stressed, and save a few dollars.

One book I most highly recommend is Kevin Ford’s *Shearing Day*, available from COUNTRYSIDE Bookstore. It covers hand shears preparation, shearer preparation, the shearing itself—including Angora goats, and many facets of wool lore.

Which Sheep Breeding Schedule is Right for You?

With a normal, seasonal schedule, most sheep are bred between August and December. But early—or late—lambing might make more sense on your homestead.

For early lambing, ewes are bred between late July and early October so they will lamb between December and early March. For late lambing, ewes are bred from October through December and lambs are born between March and May.

A number of factors can come into play in this decision, including your personal workload during various months of the year and when other family members may be available to help with lambing. Following are the advantages for both early and late lambing that may help guide you:

### Advantages of Early Lambing

1. If you plan to sell some of your lambs, it’s possible to creep feed them and have them ready in time for the Easter lamb market where you can generally get top prices.
2. You will have fewer parasite problems with lambs on early spring pastures.
3. You are more likely to breed early-born ewes as lambs six or seven months down the road, than you are lambs born later in the spring, if that’s a goal you are working toward.
4. You will have fewer fly problems at docking and castration.
5. Lambs will gain weight faster.

### Advantages of Late Lambing

1. Building and equipment requirements are less demanding, since the weather in most parts of the country is warmer when lambing occurs. It’s even possible for ewes to lamb out on pasture.
2. Mild weather means fewer chilled lambs.
3. It’s easier to shear ewes before lambing.
4. Less grain is required for lambs if you have plenty of pasture.
5. Feed cost per ewe is lower.

Temperature in your part of the country is another factor to consider. In Texas, for example, where constant temperatures of 90° to 100°F might be expected in August and September, breeding sheep later in the season would be advisable. Excessive heat not only reduces sperm production in rams, but has a definite effect on embryo survival and fetal development.

Experiments have shown that in ewes exposed to continuous 90° F temperatures on the day of breeding, none of the embryos survived. Seventy percent of the embryos were lost if the ewes were exposed to the same temperature one day after breeding. Losses continued to decrease as the pregnancy advanced.

If you are planning to breed ewe lambs from your last lamb crop, you need to make sure they are mature enough to withstand the stresses of pregnancy. Ewes can reach puberty anywhere from five to 12 months of age, depending upon the breed and various nutritional and management factors.

One university recommends that ewe lambs be healthy, strong and weigh at least 120 pounds if they are to be bred. If you want to have your lambing occur all at one time you may want to delay breeding all your ewes until your ewe lambs are ready to be bred. Or perhaps you’d rather breed older ewes early and ewe lambs late.

Once mature, ewes will naturally begin to cycle in the late summer, coming into heat every 14 to 19 days. One heat period will last 20 to 42 hours, with an average of 30 to 35 hours, and ovulation will occur toward the end of the heat period.

Regardless of which breeding procedure best fits into your homestead routine, there are some general preparations than can aid your efficiency and productivity.