

Dairy Goat Breeds

There are two national dairy breed organizations in the United States, the American Dairy Goat Association (ADGA) and the American Goat Society (AGS). ADGA maintains a herd book for nine breeds of goats, including Alpine, Guernsey, LaMancha, Nigerian Dwarf, Nubian, Oberhasli, Saanen, Sable, and Toggenburg. AGS recognizes nine breeds of goats, two miniature breeds, and seven standard breeds, including Alpine, LaMancha, Nigerian Dwarf, Nubian, Oberhasli, Saanen, Sable, and Toggenburg. AGS also registers pygmy goats.

There are three main origins of dairy goat breeds that we see in the United States. Most dairy breeds are of European descent, including Alpine, Guernsey, Nubian, Oberhasli, Saanen, Sable, and Toggenburg. Nigerian Dwarf is of African descent, while LaMancha originated in the United States. Recorded grades are registerable through the ADGA, though they are not purebred goats and can be any mixture of European or American breeds. These 10 breeds dominate the dairy goat industry.

Dairy goats' lactation period averages 284 days, with an average range of 275 to 305 days. The Dairy Herd Improvement Registry (DHIR) is a milk-testing program for producers that can be used to track milk production and composition in herds.

Alpine

Physical Characteristics

Alpine does are at least 30 inches tall, while bucks are at least 32 inches tall at the point of the withers. Mature does weigh at least 135 pounds, and bucks grow to at least 170 pounds. Coat colorations vary; breed standards include black, tan, white, and gray in varying color patterns. Acceptable color patterns include these:

- chamoisee (brown with black markings on the dorsal stripe, face, and legs)
- cou noir (black on the front of the body with white on the back of the body)
- cou clair (tan or cream on the front of the body and neck with gray shading on the back and rump)
- cou blanc (white on the neck and front of the body with black on the back and rump and black or gray markings on the head)

Variations of these patterns are also accepted:

- two-tone chamoisee (lighter front end with a gray or brown color over the rump and back)
- broken chamoisee (a solid chamoisee broken by a band or splash of another color)

Alpines' ears are erect, and they have semi-dished faces.



Milking Characteristics

Alpines produce 2,715 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 750 to 5,720 pounds of milk. Alpine does average a milk fat content of 3.5 percent and protein of 2.9 percent. They can produce 1 to 2 gallons of milk per day. Alpines have a high production rate and are great dairy goats.

Guernsey

Physical Characteristics

Guernseys have a standard golden coloration that varies in tone, and they can have partial or full white spots; they cannot have Swiss-colored markings. Hair length is an important characteristic; they can have a long or short curtain across the body and fringing along the thighs and chest. To meet the breed standard, a Guernsey must have peach, gold, or orange flesh on the muzzle, ears, eyes, mammary, scrotum, or undertail. They have erect ears.



Milking Characteristics

Guernseys are efficient producers with less milk yield compared to other recognized standard-breed dairy goats. However, breed registries are working on improving conformation and milk quantity. As Guernseys in the United States are newly recognized by dairy goat registries such as ADGA, milking statistics are not yet available. The British Guernsey, which is similar to the U.S. Guernsey, averages 6.97 pounds of milk per day with butterfat averaging 3.7 percent and protein averaging 2.8 percent. As the breed becomes more popular, more information on milking characteristics will become available.

LaMancha

Physical Characteristics

LaMancha does have a minimum height of 28 inches, while bucks average 30 inches tall at the point of the withers. Does weigh at least 130 pounds, while bucks weigh at least 160 pounds. Coat coloration widely varies as there is no standard for color or pattern. Some common colors include white, brown, gray, tan, black, and red. Patterns include sundgau, chamoisee, and pied. LaManchas have short ears, under 2 inches in length. LaManchas can have gopher or elf ear types. Both ear types have little to no cartilage and vary based on the length of the ear cartilage. The elf-type ear must remain under 2 inches in length. The gopher ear should be as minimal as possible, with a maximum length of 1 inch. However, breed standards do not allow bucks to have the gopher type of ear.



Milking Characteristics

LaManchas produce 2,298 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 830 to 4,120 pounds of milk. LaManchas have an average milk fat of 3.9 to 4.2 percent. They have an average protein of 3.2 percent.

Nigerian Dwarf

Physical Characteristics

Nigerian Dwarfs must be below 22.5 inches at the withers for does and 23.5 inches at the withers for bucks to comply with breed standards. Nigerian Dwarfs have an average weight of 75 pounds regardless of sex. Some common colors include brown, white, gray, tan, black, and red. Common patterns include

- sundgau
- buckskin (same color along the back of the neck, withers, dorsal stripe, rump, and flank with a different color on the rest of the body)
- roan (any color with white hairs dappled throughout)
- chamoisee
- moon spotted (random colored spots)

Nigerian Dwarfs have erect ears.



Milking Characteristics

Nigerian Dwarfs produce 795 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 220 to 2,110 pounds of milk. Nigerian Dwarfs have an average milk fat of greater than 6 percent and an average protein of 4.4 percent. Nigerian Dwarfs are highly desired for their quality of milk and high butterfat content of 6 to 10 percent. They make a proportionate amount of milk for their body size and can produce around a half-gallon per day.

Nubian

Physical Characteristics

Nubian does have a minimum height of 30 inches at the withers, while bucks are 32 inches at the withers to comply with breed standards. Does weigh at least 135 pounds and bucks at least 170 pounds. Nubians' defining physical features include a Roman nose, which is a distinct muzzle characteristic, and pendulous ears. Coat color can be black, white, gray, brown, or red, and patterns include roan, moon spotted, and sundgau. Patterns vary considerably in this breed.



Milking Characteristics

Nubians produce 2,018 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 510 to 3,840 pounds of milk. Nubians have an average milk fat between 4.6 and 5 percent and an average protein of 3.8 percent. They can milk around a gallon a day. Nubians have a higher butterfat content compared to other standard-breed goats.

Oberhasli

Physical Characteristics

Oberhasli does have a minimum height of 28 inches, and bucks average 30 inches tall at the point of the withers. Does weigh at least 120 pounds, while bucks weigh at least 150 pounds. Coat coloration can vary from light red to deep red or bay with black markings. Oberhasli goats have a distinct chamoisee coat pattern. Solid black does are allowed to be registered through ADGA, but this color is less preferred. Oberhasli goats have erect ears.



Milking Characteristics

Oberhaslis produce 1,995 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 1,120 to 3,050 pounds of milk. Their average milk fat is approximately 3.7 percent, and average protein is 3.0 percent. Oberhaslis can produce a half-gallon to a gallon of milk a day.

Saanen

Physical Characteristics

Saanen does have a minimum height of 30 inches, and bucks average 32 inches tall at the point of the withers. Does weigh at least 135 pounds, while bucks weigh at least 170 pounds. Coat coloration can vary from white to light cream. Spots on the skin must be smaller than 1.5 inches to conform to ADGA breed standards. Saanens have erect ears.



Milking Characteristics

Saanens produce 2,702 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 920 to 4,870 pounds of milk. Saanens have an average milk fat between 3 and 3.5 percent and an average protein of 2.9 percent. They are desired for their high production.

Sable

Physical Characteristics

Sable does have a minimum height of 30 inches, and bucks average 32 inches tall at the point of the withers. Does weigh at least 135 pounds, while bucks weigh at least 170 pounds. Coat colors and patterns are highly varied. Common colors include brown, gray, white, and black. Patterns include sundgau, chamoisee, pied, and solid. Breed standard requires that Sables be any color other than solid white or solid light cream. Sables have erect ears.



Milking Characteristics

Sables produce 2,385 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 1,540 to 3,120 pounds of milk. The average milk fat content for Sables is 3 to 3.5 percent, which is the same as Saanens'. They are desired for their high production.

Toggenburg

Physical Characteristics

Toggenburg does have a minimum height of 26 inches, and bucks average 28 inches tall at the point of the withers. Does weigh at least 120 pounds, while bucks weigh at least 150 pounds. Coat coloration can vary from dark chocolate to light fawn with cream or white markings. A solid black coat is acceptable in does, but it is less preferred. Toggenburgs have erect ears.



Milking Characteristics

Toggenburgs produce 2,237 pounds of milk during an average lactation, with a range of 1,090 to 3,840 pounds of milk. Toggenburg does have an average milk fat of 3.3 to 3.7 percent and an average protein content of 2.9 percent. Toggenburgs make around 1.5 to 2 gallons of milk a day.

Recorded Grades



Recorded grades are ADGA-recognized. Recorded grades fall into two categories: experimental and purebred. Experimental recorded grades result from breeding standard-size ADGA-recognized breeds to create a mixed-breed animal. Experimental recorded grades can be used to increase hybrid vigor. Purebred recorded grades are purebred animals that do not meet breed standards. These animals have no standard or common coat colors or patterns.

Anatomy

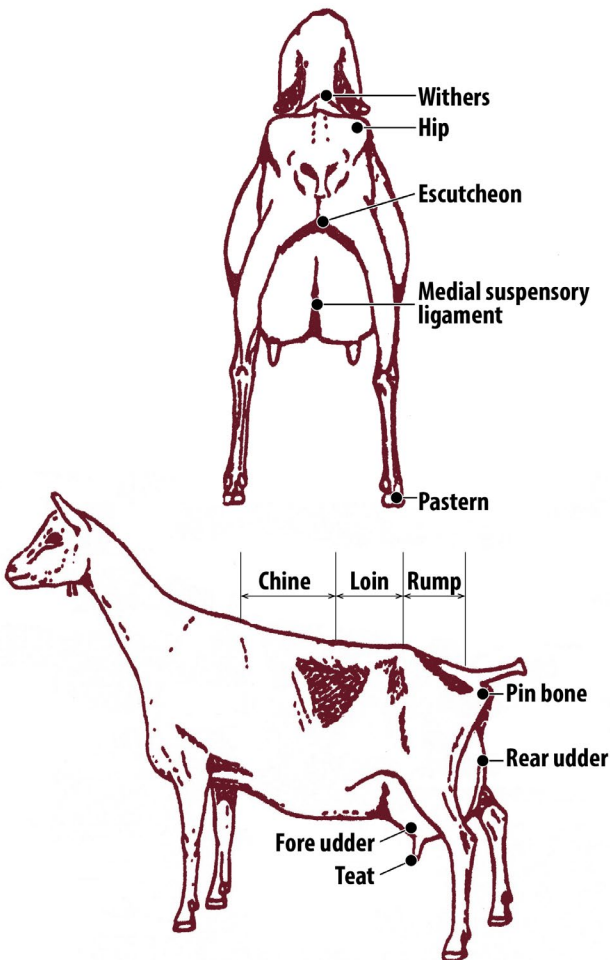
Dairy goats are measured at the withers (shoulder region) to determine their height.

Milking Comparison

Milking ability is a particularly important quality when selecting a breed. Table 1 shows the amount of milk each breed can produce and its milk fat and protein components.

Table 1. Amount of milk produced and its components by breed.

Breed	Average Lactation (lb)	Average Milk Fat (%)	Average Milk Protein (%)
Alpine	2,715	3.5	2.9
Guernsey	no data	3.7	2.8
LaMancha	2,298	3.9–4.2	3.2
Nigerian Dwarf	795	6–10	4.4
Nubian	2,018	4.6–5	3.8
Oberhasli	1,995	3.7	3.0
Saanen	2,702	3–3.5	2.9
Sable	2,385	3–3.5	no data
Toggenburg	2,237	3.3–3.7	2.9



Dairy goat anatomy. Figure based on Madera County 4-H Dairy Goat Study Guide Levels I & II, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Conclusion

Each dairy goat breed has unique physical and milking characteristics. The breed characteristics can help you decide what will best fit your farm’s goals. Certain breeds are excellent milk production goats, such as the Saanen and Sable. Others, such as the Nubian and Nigerian Dwarf, are ideal for cheese production because of their high butterfat content. Appearance and physical characteristics, including mature size, are also important when selecting dairy goats.

References

- American Dairy Goat Association. (2011). *The breed standards (PDF)*.
- American Dairy Goat Association. (2020, May 18). *ADGA breed standards*.
- American Dairy Goat Association. (n.d.). *Producing the ADGA performance pedigree!*
- American Goat Society. (n.d.). *Breed standards*.
- American Goat Society. (n.d.). *ND suggested colors and patterns*.
- American Goat Society. (n.d.). *Purebred*.
- British Goat Society. (n.d.). *Breed standards*.
- British Goat Society. (n.d.). *British Guernsey*.
- Guernsey Goat Breeders of America. (n.d.). *About Guernsey goats*.
- Holtgrew-Bohling, K., & Hanie, E. A. (2014). *Large animal clinical procedures for veterinary technicians*. Mosby.
- Kukovics, S. (2020). *Goats (Capra) from ancient to modern*. IntechOpen.
- Olenacu, E. A. B. (n.d.). *Dairy goat breeds*. Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.
- Royal Golden Guernsey Goat Society. (n.d.). *British Guernseys*.
- Sartell, J. (2024, November 5). *Raising dairy goats: A guide to breeds*. Manna Pro Sheep and Goats Blog.
- University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources. (2006). *Madera County 4-H dairy goat study guide levels I and II*.
- Van Suan, R. J., Hill, C., Kime, L. F., & Harper, J. K. (2022, February 10). *Dairy goat production*. Penn State Extension.



Photo credits: Alpine, Marigold Acres; Guernsey, Hillaire Farm of Scott's Circle; Nigerian Dwarf, Kris Lomas, Swallow Creek Dairy Goats; Saanen, Klisse Foster, Sable Dairy Goats; Sable, stock photo; all other photos, Avery Permenter, MSU.

Publication 4120 (POD-08-25)

By **Avery Permenter**, Master's Student, and **Leyla Ríos de Álvarez**, PhD, Assistant Professor and Small Ruminant Specialist, Animal and Dairy Sciences. Reviewed by **Rocky Lemus**, PhD, Extension/Research Professor, Plant and Soil Sciences, and **Dean Jousan**, PhD, Extension Professor, Animal and Dairy Sciences.

Copyright 2025 by Mississippi State University. All rights reserved. This publication may be copied and distributed without alteration for nonprofit educational purposes provided that credit is given to the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Produced by Agricultural Communications.

Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. Discrimination is prohibited in university employment, programs, or activities based on race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other status to the extent protected by applicable law. Questions about equal opportunity programs or compliance should be directed to the [Office of Civil Rights Compliance](#), 231 Famous Maroon Band Street, P.O. 6044, Mississippi State, MS 39762.

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. ANGUS L. CATCHOT JR., Director