

Raising Miniature Goats, Cows, Chickens and Sheep



Raising miniature goats, chickens and livestock is possible on a small homestead. The more people who are moving towards a simpler way of life, living more self sustainably, are still interested in having a family milk provider. When you are raising a smaller family on a smaller homestead, you don't need a full size milk producer.

What makes miniature livestock a good choice?

Small breed livestock need less pastured, fenced land, less grain. In addition, these miniature members of farm yards produce less waste. In many cases, raising miniature goats and other livestock of smaller stature makes a lot of sense for the modern homesteader. Today, many families want to return to

the agrarian roots, but don't have the money to buy a large ranch and raise full size cattle, goats, pigs or other livestock. A smaller homestead, of a few acres, allows these families the room to grow vegetables, and also keep some livestock for the family's needs.

Are Nigerian Dwarf Goats the best choice?

Choosing to raise miniature goats or cows and other livestock allows the family to fit more production into the family homestead. Lesa Wilke, author of *Nigerian Goats 101: Background & Basics* (2015) and creator of the popular Better Hens and Gardens blog (www.betterhensandgardens.com) states

“Nigerian Dwarf goats are becoming quite popular because they're small, cute, low maintenance, and very productive for their size. They don't require pastures, are easy to handle and house, and can provide milk, meat, brush control, and fertilizer. They are the size of a medium to large dog, so they're an easy homestead addition – regardless of whether the homestead is large, small, rural, suburban, or urban. For us, it was the small size, brush control, and incredible tasting milk that caused us to choose them for our farm. ” – Lesa Wilke



Points in favor of Miniature goats and livestock

Most breeds of miniatures have decent dispositions, along with the smaller size. These qualities allow them almost pet status in the family. Along with the smaller size comes less feed intake and less manure waste. The feed conversion for most miniature livestock is very good.

When making the decision about raising miniature goats...

Miniature livestock are still larger than many family dogs. If you don't have the strength and fortitude to handle a large dog, you may not be able to handle raising miniature goats and other miniature livestock. Be realistic about your personal strength and abilities before acquiring any size livestock. Because the miniature goats, cows and sheep usually have sweet, docile dispositions they may not bite but kicks can be

dangerous!

What care is required?

The same items of care needs to be performed on miniature livestock as it does on the full size versions. Hoof trimming, worming, milking, shearing, health checkups all need to be done. Check to see if there is a livestock veterinarian in your area. While some forms of care could be performed by any licensed veterinarian, these animals are still livestock with the specialized needs of livestock. Finding an urban veterinarian willing to come out to your farm and trod through mud to help an ailing cow, miniature or not, is unlikely.

Fencing, Housing, Equipment

Unless you want to go collect your livestock from the neighbor's garden, make sure you have the correct fencing for the animals you choose to raise on your farm. Even though the animals are shorter, pygmy goats for example, are very good at jumping over fences. Raising miniature goats, cows, or pigs means you still must supply the animals with the correct fencing, housing and equipment. A milk stand will forever change your life and keep your back from hurting, too. Consider placement of the run in shed or mini barn. The best setting for the shed or barn is with the closed back side of the shed facing the wind.

What are the benefits to raising miniature goats and other livestock?

Nigerian Dwarf, Pygmy, and **Dwarf Nubians goats** are a few of the breeds of miniature goats. Lesa Wilke, in her book, *Nigerian Goats 101:Background and Basics*, has a chart showing the different breeds of goats and the milk yield. Nubian goats

produce more than other commonly raised breeds but the Nigerian Dwarf is a solid performer in milk production. At a fraction of the size of a full grown Nubian doe, the feed savings and space requirements are much less.

Which breeds have miniature counterparts?

There are miniature versions of the Nubian breed available, too, although the Nigerian Dwarf breed is more easily found. The Nigerian Dwarf is an actual breed, originating in Africa for dairy needs. Crossing a Nigerian Dwarf with a full size Nubian or other dairy breed of goat, leads to a smaller version of the breed. They appear to be smaller Nubians. The milk production of the miniaturized breeds is from 65 % to 75% of the full size goat. Other smaller goat breeds include the Pygmy, Kinders, and the Pygora. Pygora's are a registered cross between a pygmy and an angora. Pygoras are generally raised for their soft fiber and sheared like sheep or alpacas. When seeking a breed for raising miniature goats, checking with your local breeders for their feedback is a good place to start.



Miniature Cattle, Highlands, Dexters and Lowlines

Raising miniature cattle for both meat and milk can be accomplished on small homesteads. It is important to keep in mind that the same challenges that pertain to full size cattle will still be in play, but on a lessor scale. Cattle are mostly grazing animals. Your full size cattle will need grazing area or to be fed good quality hay until market size is reached. Miniature breeds of cattle are often browsers as much as grazers. This means they will be happy to do some land clearing for you, eating weeds, and brush as well as the grass. The amount of feed needed will be less with the miniatures and the Highlands will thrive on low quality brush, due to their heritage as mountain cattle.

Highland Cattle

The Highland breed is gaining in popularity. The breed is versatile and hardy. The feed conversion is reportedly very good. In addition, you can't argue with the cute factor of the miniature Highland breed! Be prepared if you are squeamish about raising your own meat source. These miniature cows have a very high cuteness factor.



Dexter Breed

Dexter Cattle, Lowlines, miniature Jersey and Miniature Zebu are other popular breeds of miniature cattle, recognized by the International Miniature Cattle Breeder Society and Registry. The Dexter breed is an ancient breed from the mountains in Ireland. Dexters were not developed from miniaturizing a standard breed.

Lowlines

Lowlines are short, smaller versions of the standard Black Angus. You will appreciate the characteristics of great meat quality and yield is still available in the smaller, shorter version of the Black Angus breed too.

Just as when raising miniature goats, raising a small herd of miniature cattle can be a dual purpose venture in both food production and land clearing. Also, keep in mind that goats, sheep, and cattle are herd animals and will not do as well when you only keep one. You will need to keep two or more of the species you choose to raise.

Are there miniatures in pigs, sheep and poultry?

Pigs, Sheep, Ducks and Chickens all have miniature versions of breeds. Some breeds of pigs are smaller than the standard market hogs we commonly see on farms. KuneKune pigs are becoming more popular. A note of caution is in order. All pigs grow to be sizable animals. Even the smaller breeds will grow rather large and you need to take this into consideration before attempting to raise "smaller" breeds of pigs. Miniature pigs also include the small pot belly breeds, although those are not commonly raised for meat but are kept as pets.

What are Babydoll Sheep

Babydolls sheep are actually a small Southdown sheep. These minis are much smaller than the full sized sheep breeds. They are good foragers and grazers and not very needy in terms of extra care. The standard run in shed and a good low fence, plenty of available water and a vet familiar with sheep, should get you off to a good start with this smaller breed of sheep.



Ike, our mini southdown, chats with the piglets about the rules of the grassy field.

Call Ducks and Bantam Chickens

When you see the Call Ducks, a breed of miniature duck, you might want a whole flock. While they can be rather pricey to get started with, Bantam chickens are usually more of a bargain. Bantam chickens are much smaller than a standard size chicken. Coop space, and feed and water consumption is less than the standard chickens also. As with other minis, production is somewhat based on size. Three Bantam eggs equals one large egg from a standard breed of chicken. The bantams are prone to broodiness, and make very good Mother Hens. Bantam chickens are a good choice for children starting to raise chickens on the homestead. When you choose bantam chickens you often get very docile chickens, although the roosters can get a little feisty.



Give Raising Miniature Goats, Sheep, Pigs and Chickens a try.

If you are planning on raising miniature goats, or any other miniature breed of livestock, prepare your land as you would for any livestock. You can get by with less land and less costs associated with feed. The end result will be a more self-sufficient homestead for your family. Have you considered raising miniature farm animals?



**Raising Miniature Goats,
Chickens and Livestock**



