

# How to Know When

By Maggie Leman

Nanny Girl looks like she is going to pop any day now. Of course, life outside the barn goes on. There is a job to go to, family to care for, and that all important thing: sleep! How can we tell when she is going to kid without spending all our time in the barn?



There are several signs a doe may display as she gets closer to kidding. The most accurate seems to be that the tail ligaments go completely soft shortly before she kids. To read the tail ligaments, place your hand over the rump and with your first and second fingers or your thumb and forefinger feel for a ligament on either side of the spine in the hollow about 1 ½ inches below the spine and running at about a 45 degree slope. Feel these tendons twice a day morning and evening, at feeding time. They will start to become soft as the doe nears kidding and will become completely slack 8 to 12 hours before she kids. The entire area just above the tail gets very soft; you will be able to nearly close your fingers around the spine above the tailhead when kidding is very close.

Another change is when the kids drop down into the abdomen as they are getting into position for delivery. The doe's belly looks closer to the ground as viewed from the side and she may not look quite so wide when delivery is close.

The mucus plug may dissolve and start to pass out of the vagina. It looks like thick creamy whitish mucus, sometimes hanging in a small string from the vulva. This can happen several days, even a few weeks before kidding or be expelled as the doe goes into active labor. Most of our does pass their mucus plug during the week before they deliver.

The doe's udder will suddenly become engorged, and maybe even shiny, and the teats will fill and look larger, blending into the udder body. I watch for this about 12 to 24 hours before kidding.

The doe may go off feed one meal before kidding, just nibbling at or completely ignoring her grain ration, though lots of does eat all the way through labor! Sometimes the off feed thing is pretty subtle. And be aware it could be a sign of a doe becoming hypocalcemic. If she is off feed at the next feeding start treating for pregnancy toxemia.

She may build a nest, pawing and piling straw under and around her, this is usually a pretty sure sign the doe is feeling the start of contractions. Her respiration rate will increase, and you may even see her stare off into space, and sort of hold her breath as she has a mild uterine contraction. She may stand up and stretch, arching her back and lifting her tail up as she has a contraction, and then lay back down again arranging her nest around her as she does.

She may start to bleat in a soft way, making the same sounds she will make to her newborn. Some does lick their lips like they are licking their baby clean, particularly if she has kidded before. A lot of these signs are pretty subtle; it pays to know your goat and her normal behavior, follow your instincts, even you first-timers. Call for help or advice or even a bit of hand holding if you feel you need it.