

## Taming Skittish Goats



Recently, I got an email from someone asking advice on taming some very skittish goats. She was wondering if she would have to just take all of the kids for bottle-raising, and sell the adult does as being hopeless. We find it is almost as easy to tame wild adults as it is to tame the kids. It just takes patience and perseverance. You have to always remember that goats are prey animals, the run first and ask questions later. Nevertheless they are also curious and intelligent and can learn that humans can be trusted. Mainly one can't use force; you have to convince the goats you mean no harm, and are actually the finest of friends, blessed with fingers that can reach all of the itchy places.

We have long since taught all of our does they have to come into the barn where we close the gate and lock them into the barn **before** they are fed. You might do the same and then sit on the ground with their feed bowl close by. Sit very still, talking softly to them. Move the bowl just a little closer each day until you can sit with their feed bowl in your lap, while they come to you for food. After they are coming to you with confidence you can start gently reaching toward them (never come from above, always from the front at eye level so they can see you) to gently touch or allow them to reach out to you to sniff. When they are used to you hanging around while they eat you can take the next step. Catch up each doe and teach her that the only way she is being fed is to be tied to her own place in the barn or to get up on the milking stanchion each will tame down very quickly. Just be as gentle and persistent as you can when you go to catch them. Get them into an enclosed space like the barn or a stall then carefully trap them in a corner, try not to run toward them or run them down, eventually most goats realize they are trapped and will "wait for the inevitable". Gently drop a looped rope around their neck to lead them to a tie spot for dinner or to the stanchion. This will take some time at first but they soon learn the routine and allow handling. While they are tied you can gently handle them all over finding itchy spots to scratch, they like their arm pits and between their dewclaws scratched, and their withers and neck. This is a lot like wild mustangs are tamed and taught to trust. Some goats never become dog friendly but all can be taught to be handled.

As for kids, ALL kids are born skittish, wild as little deer, even ones born to the tamest does. They don't learn to be skittish from their dams; it comes naturally as a survival instinct. Each must be tamed and this is done with persistence and very early handling. Early handling, even before they are dry, and during their first 5 days after birth seems to be the most effective way for laying the groundwork for trust in humans. This is the time of bonding, and they will bond with you AND their dam. Bottle feeding is not required. Then you might want to separate the kids from the does at feeding time each day for an hour or so, and sit with them and handle them and play with them. I have always found my bottle-raised kids to be annoying and ultra-clingy as they reach maturity, and many have problems fitting into a herd of mostly dam-raised goats. They live a life on the edge, not a real member of the herd and not a housepet. See my *Born (To Live) in a Barn* article, for why I prefer to let the does raise their kids.