

Keeping Goats Warm

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I write this as we are in the midst of the grip of cold. I dream of a snug, organized barn with running water, lights and all of the other accoutrements of perfect goat raising. The reality is bonding pens scattered around, hauling buckets of water from the house twice a day to the barn, in the dark. Sound familiar? Hey, I could be living in an apartment in town. I like my lifestyle a whole lot better, don't you?

Area 4 met last Saturday. I so enjoy getting together with all of these folks. Sharing ideas and concerns is such an important part of what OMGP is. We are fortunate in the goat world to have many sources of information. Goat Rancher and other publications are full of valuable tips on dealing with all sorts of problems but what I like best is meeting directly with other farmers for the morale support and camaraderie. Here are some interesting tips that I gleaned from this meeting.

Why do we have our does kidding at this time of year? It's cold, wet and dark. Do you think your does would really be flirting with the bucks in August if they had any idea what they were in for? I really don't get it but here are some very practical ideas for trying to make the best of January and February kidding. I felt like giving Barbara Bingham a standing ovation for this one. Take a heater. Not just any heater but one of those fairly inexpensive ones that look like steam radiators but are actually oil filled, electrically energized types. They have them at Bimart. While you are picking one up, also buy a metal trashcan with a lid. Take them home, drill a hole in the lid of the can. Stick the heater in the can with the cord coming out of the hole in the lid. Secure the lid and the can so that it can't be dismantled by the goats. Might be a good idea to run the cord through pvc pipe as an extra safety measure. Plug it in. Make sure that the goats can't get at the cord. You now have a heater for your goat area. The goats will appreciate cuddling up to this version of a roaring campfire! Another great idea that she had was cutting off the sleeves of sweat shirts. Put a couple of holes at one end and you have a washable sweater for cold kids. It's amazing what you can come up with to provide some comfort in these cold days. I ended up putting to use all of the beds, kennels and igloo that I had for my dearly departed Jack Russell. Each of my bonding pens has something in it that is salvaged and works well to provide extra shelter for those new kids. They have a sixth sense about finding and putting these little houses to use. I happened to have a heating pad made specifically for dogs that is very sturdy with a steel wrapped cord. It fits just right into a dog crate and the kids absolutely love it. Another more economic suggestion was to moisten a towel, place it in a plastic bag and then microwave it. Wrapping it in another towel would keep a source of warmth going for quite awhile. I am a firm believer in survival of the fittest but I figure that if the kids make it past the first few days then they are going to survive so why not spoil them a bit.

Since we don't have permanent bonding pens set up as yet, we just created as we went. Mostly we built on the spot of where the doe kidded as she thought this was a pretty good

place to begin with. This avoided having to move her and the kids. This is when the investment of a few extra hog panels comes in really handy. Kids can't get out and the fencing is low enough so that you can tend to feed, bedding and water without too much hassle. A suggestion from Andrea Kraemer was to just pull the panel into a circle and clip it. I thought that was dandy. We bent ours to fit the situation at hand but that leaves you with a bent panel that might not work in the next application. I love to hangout at the local recycle yard. I sometimes come away with sturdy but odd things that come in handy in the future. One is a piece of plastic pipe from a large water slide. It looks like a giant piece of elbow macaroni with a flange on it. I originally thought I would bolt it to a piece of plywood and use it for a horse feeder but it morphed first into a jungle gym for last year's kids and is now in use as another shelter from the cold for this year's wee ones.

I wish that I didn't have to have an outside job in town but this is the reality for a lot of us with a bad goat habit. My biggest frustration is that, so far, my does have had multiples of 3 and 4 with only a couple that were sensible to limit themselves to twins. Because I didn't want to have any surprises when I got home from work, I put some of my less experienced does into smaller areas so that if they kidded while I was gone, at least they wouldn't wander away and leave the kids to die. This worked somewhat but with the poor does popping out so many kids, they lost track and we lost a few to being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Newborn kid vs full sized doe equals suffocation. My husband was unhappy but I happen to look at it in a different way. I kept quoting Cliff Burke. You want your does to have just two kids. One to pay for the upkeep of the doe and the other to sell for, gulp, profit. Made me feel better and the does are better off as well as the surviving kids. I guess the bottom line of this is that you really have to think about your resources. We tried to help some of the puny ones through the first couple of days but quickly concluded that our energy and supplies needed to go to the vigorous kids that were obviously going to do well. The less likely candidates for survival often times will put a drain on your time and pocketbook for some time to come. In my perfect world, in that warm and snug barn with the running water and lots of lights, all of my wee ones would survive. I am just one farmer that is trying the best she can with an eye for doing even better in the future. With the wonderful help of my fellow OMGP members.