

PROPER DISBUDDING TECHNIQUE IN GOATS

Elisabeth M. Lau DVM

Disbudding is the removal of horn buds in young goats. Having a goat without horns is a must in showing and dairy management. When goats butt heads, pun intended, they can cause trauma to younger or weaker goats and to the udder. The time to decide if you want your goats dehorned is before they are born so that you can have all of the necessary equipment prior to their arrival.

The equipment that you will need to disbud is a disbudding iron (available at feed stores or online livestock supply stores), a board to test the iron, and clippers to remove the hair around the horn buds. A kidding box is also extremely helpful, especially if you are limited on extra hands around the farm. There are many plans available online that can be made specific to your breed of goat.



Kidding box and supplies. Photo by Krazo Acres



Disbudding iron

Once the goats are born, their heads should be checked daily for horn bud development. Some bucklings can be born with horn buds so it is important to address them early. Once a raised area has developed on the top of the head, disbudding should be performed. If the horn buds are too large or are starting to erupt through the skin, it can be too late to properly disbud the goats. Disbudding at this point can lead to the development of scurs or abnormal horn growth. These scurs can break off and bleed or grow so abnormally they become imbedded in the goat's skin or can compromise their vision.

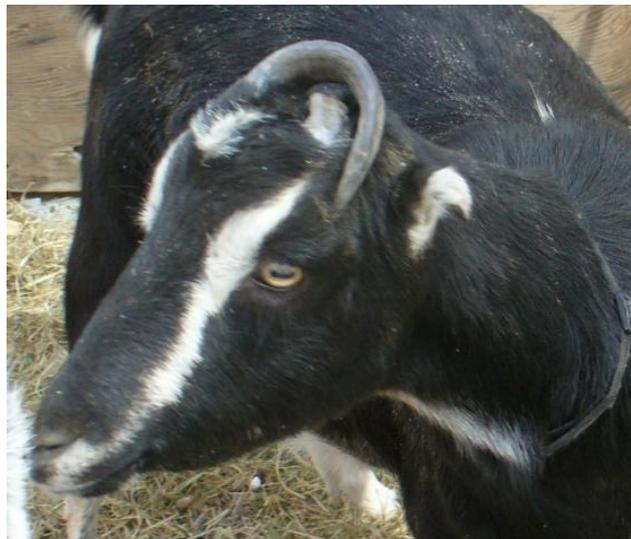
Identifying the Proper Horn Bud Length for Disbudding



Proper size of horn buds



Horn buds that are too large



Doe with scurs from improper disbudding

Disbud Technique

To start, properly restrain the goat or place in the disbudding box.



Clip the hair around the horn buds.

This not only allows for better visualization of the buds, but it also helps focus the burning iron.



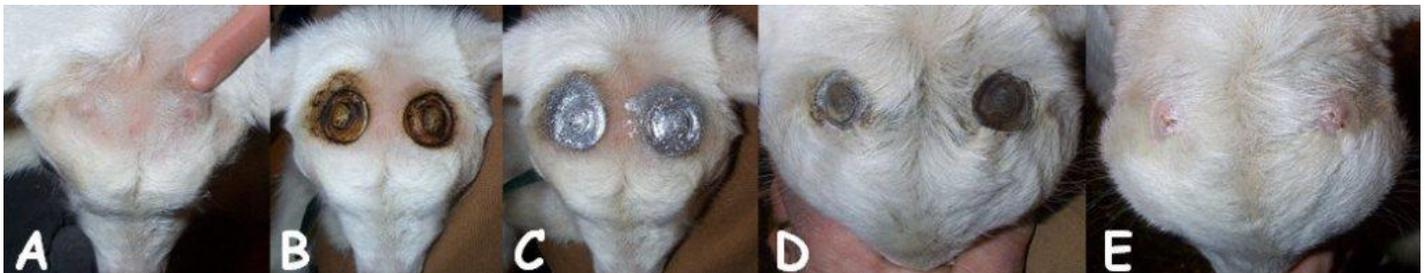
Holding the goat's head in place, carefully place the disbudding iron on the horn bud. Pressing down, rotate the iron back and forth around the horn bud for 5 seconds. It may be helpful to have a stop watch or count in your head. If the iron is held in place for longer than 5 seconds, it can cause thermal necrosis of the brain. Repeat this process twice. Another helpful tip may be to wear thick leather gloves. Goats can be very strong and obviously disbudding is not a comfortable process. The leather gloves can help keep you from accidentally burning yourself or other parts of the goat's head.



Ideally there should be an even copper ring around each horn bud.



Do not apply any salve or triple antibiotic to the buds. In 7-10 days, the scabs will fall off. Some bucklings may require multiple disbuddings. This may also be true if the horn buds were too large at the time of disbudding. This picture illustrates the timeline of what the areas will look like after each stage of disbudding (the silver spray is an aluminum antiseptic spray; however it is unnecessary).



After disbudding, let the goats back in with their mom or have a bottle ready. The quickest way to make the little ones forget what just happened to them is to have a belly full of milk.

For more questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call (775) 849-0120 or email betsylaudvm@yahoo.com.

Additional Recommended Sources:

Fias Co Farm (www.fiascofarm.com) – excellent articles and photo guides for goat enthusiasts.

Hoegger Farmyard (www.hoeggerfarmyard) – one of the best online supplies for all of your goat needs.