

CANADIAN  
MEAT GOAT  
Association

CANADIENNE  
de la CHEVRE  
de BOUCHERIE

**If you decide that your herd is better off without horns, it is advisable to disbud the kids at a young age.**



## Disbudding Kids

**H**orns are an important part of the goat's defensive system against predators, play a role in determining and maintaining social status, and can be useful "handles" for goat producers during management.

Whereas many breeds of cattle have been selected for a naturally-polled condition, this appears not to be possible in goats. Breeding two naturally polled goats results in a high proportion of hermaphrodites (having both ovarian and testicular tissue) among the offspring.

Whether or not to disbud meat goats, and Boer goats in particular, remains debatable and often comes down to the personal preferences of the individual goat breeder. In South Africa, Boer goat breeders leave the horns on their goats as the horns are needed for survival on the veldt and as "handles". Horn shape and placement are an important part of the grading system at shows.

In Canada, there are more factors to consider. Many meat goats are fenced with field fencing or wire mesh. This type of fencing does not go well with horned goats. The grass is always greener on the other side, and inevitably a goat will stick her head through the fence. If horned,

she will need assistance to get her head back out! A strand or two of electric wire inside the wire mesh fencing will reduce this problem greatly.

There can also be problems housing

horned goats with hornless ones, as horned goats have a decided advantage in weaponry when it comes to jousting for social position within the herd.

If you decide that your herd is better off without horns, it is advisable to disbud the kids at a young age. Bucks can be disbudded as soon as 4-7 days of age. Does' horns develop more slowly and sometimes can be left to 21 days of age. The older the kids are and the more developed their horn buds are, the more chance of getting scurs (partial regrowth of the horn tissue, usually misshapen).

We recommend you consult with your veterinarian for advice on disbudding techniques, and even for a lesson.

### GENERAL TECHNIQUE

A hot disbudding iron and good restraint of the kid are keys to successful disbudding. There are many brands of electric dehorers; a popular choice is the Rhinehart X50. Some models come with a long cord so as to avoid the use of an extension cord, which can increase the time needed for the iron to heat up and decrease the temperature it will heat up to.

Restraint of the kid can be accomplished by a variety of body positions (yours or your assistant's and the kid's) or by using a disbudding box, available through goat supply companies (or you can make your own). Wear leather gloves while restraining the kid, as the hot iron will come in close contact with

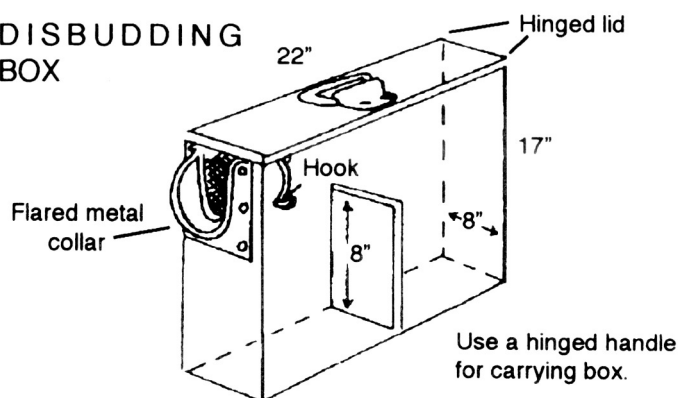
your hands during the procedure and could result in painful burns.

Plug in the iron and let it heat up. While waiting, you can clip the hair around the horn buds on top of the kid's head, using scissors or small electric clippers. This makes it easier to see what you are doing and there is less burning hair. Just before disbudding, check the iron for the correct temperature by burning a ring on a piece of wood. The iron should burn a ring instantly. If not, allow it to heat up longer.

When the iron is hot and the kid is securely restrained, you are ready to begin. Keeping the kid's ears out of the way, place the iron firmly over the horn bud. Rotate it to make sure you get the entire horn bud. Burn for a full ten seconds. This will seem like the longest ten seconds in the world, because the kid will be screaming and struggling throughout. It helps to have a watch or clock with a second hand in sight so that you are not tempted to think ten seconds are up in half the time!

Remove the iron. Using horn nippers or a utility knife, cut off the horn bud in the centre

DISBUDDING BOX



of the burned ring. Burn again, using the side of the barrel of the iron in a rolling motion to cauterize the area within the burned ring. This will minimize scurs and cauterize to stop any bleeding. Do not leave the iron on any one spot for more than ten seconds. A copper colour to the burned area indicates a "good burn".

Repeat on the other side. After both horn buds are done, apply wound spray to disinfect and repel flies. This should be re-applied if the wound appears moist or oozing, or if flies seem to be attracted to the wound.

Disbudding is not a pleasant task but a necessary one if you do not want horned goats.



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