

Pygora - The 'Born in The USA' Luxury-Fiber Goat

By Terri L. Kistler, Whistlekick Pygoras

When asked about luxury fibers for spinning, knitting or crocheting, most people mention alpaca or cashmere. But did you know that there is a 'bred in the USA' luxury fiber? Let me introduce you to the Pygora goat.

Developed in Oregon in the 1980s by Katherine Jorgensen, the Pygora goat produces a wonderful, lofty, decadently-soft, warm fiber in a range of colors. Add in a playful, friendly personality, a manageable size, and good health and you have the perfect fiber goat.



Goats in general make wonderful pets or hobby farm 'livestock'. They require much less in terms of feed, housing, pasture, etc. than cows or horses need. Being browsers rather than grazers, goats can thrive on an undeveloped pasture (as long as it is clear of toxic plant species). As a medium-sized goat, Pygoras are particularly well suited to this niche. Does (females) average 22 in. at the withers and 88-120 lb. while bucks (intact males) and wethers (neutered males goats) average 27 in. at the withers and weigh a bit more than the does. This smaller size allows easy handling of Pygoras even for children or smaller individuals.

Pygoras tend to be very healthy goats as long as they receive proper care, including good feed, regular foot trims, vaccinations and worming as needed determined by



fecal test results. They do not require grain unless they are pregnant or growing youngsters, but they do appreciate a small amount each day. Good-quality grass hay will maintain their condition very nicely. They breed easily, usually kid with few issues, and are good mothers. Twins and even triplets are not uncommon.

The Pygora can serve as a nice ‘homestead’ goat—in addition to their fiber, they produce a surprising amount of milk for a fiber goat. Several Pygora breeders regularly milk their does and make cheeses.

Personality

Pygoras are very friendly goats. If I pass by one of the house windows that face the barn and pasture, they call to me. They are intensely curious and whenever I appear outside, my entire herd comes running and tags along, inspecting my work and sticking their soft little noses into my tool bag or wheelbarrow. Whenever I am in the field or the barn, they crowd round me for a pat or a scratch or to check my pockets to see if I have any treats. Pygoras like to have company and attention.

It is important to note that, like any animal, a Pygora must be handled properly with love and respect for it to be a trusting, happy, friendly goat. And, like any goat, they do not like to be alone. Having only one goat is a recipe for a very lonely, unhappy goat.



Many people worry about Pygoras jumping over fences or up on their vehicles, etc. In my experience, they are more apt to try to wiggle under fences rather than over them. With Pygoras as with any animal, ‘good fences make good neighbors’. It is important to have well-built fences in good repair as the goats like to rub against the fences.

Fleece Types

In addition to their happy personality and innate ‘cuteness’, Pygoras are treasured for their incredibly soft, warm fleece. Pygoras come in many colors: white, brown, several shades of caramel, black and several shades of gray. They often show two different colors throughout the year: an ‘in fleece’ color that is lighter and an ‘out of fleece’ color that is darker. They may have a darker dorsal stripe, ‘socks’, ‘crowns’, ‘frosting’ on ears and noses or a badger face.

There are three fleece types in Pygoras:

Type A—this fleece resembles kid mohair. It averages 6 in. in length, is long, lustrous, has ringlets and should have few guard hairs. The fiber is very fine, usually less than 28 microns (fibers 30 microns and greater feel prickly against your skin). The handle should be silky, smooth and cool to the touch (this means when you wiggle your fingers into the fleece on the goat, it will be cool and silky feeling). Type A goats usually are shorn twice a year.



Type B—this is my personal favorite fleece type of the three. It is a strong, lustrous fiber, curly and very soft. A type B fleece averages 3-6 in. long, and may have two types of guard hairs: an obvious, stiff guard hair and a silky guard hair. It is very versatile and warm. The handle is soft and airy, and the fiber averages below 24 microns. Fleece color usually is lighter than guard hair color. Type B goats also usually are shorn twice a year.

Type C—this fleece is very short (usually 1-3 in. long), but can be as soft as fine cashmere (below 18.5 microns). It is a matte fiber with crimp and with good separation between the coarse guard hair and the fleece. The fleece color usually is lighter than the guard hair color. A type C coat can be brushed or plucked from the goat. The yield is quite small, but the effort is worth it. Type C fleece is unbelievably soft and very warm for the weight. It is best used for lace garments.



No one fleece type is better than the others; they merely have different characteristics. All three types are very soft and beautiful. And Pygoras maintain their fleece curl and fineness as the goat ages.

Also, note that all three Pygora types have guard hairs. There is a prevailing myth that type-A goats do not have guard hairs, but this is untrue. Type-A goats will have fewer guard hairs and they may be finer and softer, but they still are present in the fleece.

To give you an idea of how Pygora fiber compares to other fibers (the lower the micron count, the softer the fiber):

- Angora rabbit and qiviut – 10-12 microns
- Cashmere – 14-19 microns
- Pygora 18-28 microns
- Fine merino – 19 microns
- Alpaca – 26-28 microns
- Llama – 28-30 microns
- Angora goat – 30-55 microns (increases with age of goat)

A Pygora goat produces 6 oz. to 2 lb. of fiber per shearing. My type-B Pygoras average 1 lb. per shearing. They are sheared twice a year: once in the fall and once in the spring, depending on weather and if the fleece is showing signs of matting. The fall shearing is a lighter yield as the goats are starting to grow fleece after the summer. The spring shearing is the big one. The goats have been growing fleece all winter in the cold so the yield is high.

Pygora fleece must be dehaired before use - leaving the guard hairs in the fleece results in a prickly yarn or garment. Although you can try using mini combs, hand cards and/or tweezers to remove guard hairs from the fiber, dehairing is best accomplished by a commercial dehairing machine. There are many fiber processors who dehair Pygora.



Because Pygora is a luxury fiber and is very warm even when knitted or crocheted in lace, the best use for Pygora yarn is for small things like baby hats or clothes, scarves, shawls, wristlets, cowls, etc.



In short, the Pygora is a friendly, useful, healthy fiber goat that can help earn its upkeep all wrapped up in a fluffy, cute package. For more information on Pygoras, contact a Pygora breeder and visit the Pygora Breeders Association (PBA) website: <http://www.pygoragoats.org/>

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