



A free guide from Throf

Sheep Farming Guide for Beginners: Step by Step to a First Sale

A sheep farming guide for beginners: set a goal, start small, buy healthy ewes, housing, feed, breeding year, health and records, plus a 12-month plan.

Sheep farming for beginners follows a clear path: decide your goal (fattening, breeding, milk or festival sales such as Eid), start small with about 20 to 50 ewes, buy healthy animals after checking teeth, udder, feet and body condition, and quarantine them before mixing. Then set up shade, water and feed, plan the breeding year, work with a local vet and record every animal from day one.

This guide is for anyone starting a first flock: a family member taking over a few animals, a new smallholder with some land, or someone building a side income. There are no quick-money promises here, only a practical route that keeps first-year losses low. The first year is when you learn the most, so plan to learn more than you earn.

Step 1: Decide your goal before you buy a single animal

Your goal decides the breed, the size of the housing, the type of feed and the selling date. The common choices are:

- **Fattening:** buy young rams or weaned lambs, feed them for a few months and sell. Money turns over faster, but profit depends on the buying price and feed cost.
- **Breeding:** keep ewes and a ram and sell the offspring. Income is slower, but you build your own flock year after year.
- **Milk:** needs a dairy breed, daily milking work and a nearby market for milk or cheese.
- **Festival sales:** plan lambing or buying so the animals reach selling weight a few weeks before Eid al-Adha, Christmas or another high-demand season in your area.

Many farmers end up combining breeding with fattening their own male lambs. As a beginner, though, you will do better by choosing one main goal and mastering it first.

Step 2: Start small and learn at low cost

Starting with about 20 to 50 ewes and one ram suits most beginners. It is enough to learn lambing, feeding, disease and selling, and small enough that a mistake will not sink you. One mature ram usually covers about 30 to 40 ewes in natural mating.

Before you buy, answer three questions: where will feed come from all year, where is your reliable water source, and who will work with the animals every day? Keep a cash reserve that covers several months of feed, because in a breeding flock the first real income can take about a year.

Step 3: Choose the breed and buy healthy animals

Pick a breed that buyers in your area want and that copes with your climate. Local, heat-tolerant breeds are usually a safer start than imported ones. Our [sheep breeds guide](#) compares the main options.

Inspect every animal yourself. Never buy a batch without looking:

- **Teeth:** give you an approximate age. A ewe with worn or missing teeth is near the end of her productive life.
- **Udder:** two even, soft halves, with no lumps, hard areas or damaged teats.
- **Feet and walking:** no limping, no bad smell between the claws, no long twisted hooves.
- **Body condition:** feel the back just behind the ribs. You want neither a thin animal with sharp bones nor a very fat one; moderate condition is right.
- **General signs:** bright eyes, clean nose with no discharge, no patchy wool or hair loss, and a good appetite.

Ask the seller about past vaccinations and lambing history if there is one. On arrival, keep the new animals in a separate pen for about 3 to 4 weeks before mixing them with others, as explained in our guide to [quarantine for new animals](#).

Step 4: Housing, feed and water

Housing: you do not need an expensive building. You need good shade, airflow and dry ground. Plan about 1.5 to 2 square metres of roofed space per ewe, plus a larger open yard. Divide the space from the start into pens for ewes, the ram, lambs and isolation.

Feed: sheep need roughage (hay, straw or grazing) and, depending on their stage, some concentrate such as barley or a commercial ration. Ewes in late pregnancy and while nursing need more than empty ewes. Change rations gradually over several days, and keep a salt and mineral lick within reach.

Water: clean water available at all times is the cheapest medicine you have. A ewe drinks from about 4 to more than 10 litres a day depending on heat, milk production and feed, and much more in hot weather. Clean troughs often and make sure they never run dry at midday.

Keep your herd in Throf, not in notebooks

Throf records every animal by number and colour tag, tracks mating, lambing, vaccinations, weights, expenses and sales, and works out cost per head and net profit. Free for small herds.

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Step 5: The breeding year, from mating to weaning

1. **Preparation:** about 3 to 4 weeks before mating, slightly improve the ewes' feeding and check the ram and his feet.
2. **Mating:** put the ram with the ewes for about 5 to 6 weeks (roughly two heat cycles) and write down the dates he goes in and comes out.
3. **Pregnancy:** gestation in sheep is about 147 days (142 to 152). Ask your vet to check pregnancy about 6 to 8 weeks after the ram is removed.
4. **Lambing:** prepare a clean lambing pen, make sure every lamb gets colostrum in its first hours, and record births and twins.
5. **Weaning:** lambs are usually weaned at about 2 to 3 months, depending on their weight and your system, then moved to fattening or kept as replacements.

Step 6: Health basics

- **Vaccination:** follow the programme set by your local vet and your national veterinary services. Do not copy another farm's schedule.
- **Worm and parasite control:** follow a plan from your vet based on season and testing, not random dosing.
- **Hoof trimming** when needed, and clean bedding and feeders.

Call the vet straight away if you see an animal off its feed, a clear fever or dullness, severe diarrhoea, breathing difficulty, an abortion, a ewe straining without delivering within a reasonable time, or several deaths close together.

Step 7: Records and money from day one

A beginner who keeps no records cannot tell whether the flock makes or loses money. For each animal, record its number, sex, approximate age, weight, vaccinations and treatments, mating and lambing. Record every expense (feed, vet, labour, water, transport) and every sale, then work out your cost per head each month.

With Throf you register each animal by its number and ear-tag colour, follow mating, pregnancy, lambing and vaccinations with reminders, and see expenses, sales, net profit and cost per head in one place. The free plan covers small herds, so you can start clean records on the first day without extra cost.

Common beginner mistakes

- Buying a large number of animals at once, before gaining any experience.
- Buying cheap animals without inspection, then mixing them straight away with no quarantine.
- Leaving the ram with the ewes all year, so lambs arrive at the worst time.
- Changing feed suddenly or neglecting water in summer.
- Treating sick animals without a vet, and keeping no expense records.
- Waiting for the festival season to sell without checking weight and cost in advance.

For the bigger management picture once you are running, read [10 foundations of a successful sheep farm](#).

A 12-month calendar for your first year

Count month 1 as the month you buy, and shift the timing to fit your local seasons and the selling date you are aiming for.

Month	What to do
1	Prepare pens, water and feeders; agree with a vet; buy, quarantine and register every animal
2	Mix the flock after quarantine; vaccinate and control parasites as your vet advises; score body condition
3	Improve ewes' feeding, then put the ram in and record the date
4	Remove the ram after about 5 to 6 weeks; watch for ewes returning to heat
5	Pregnancy check with the vet; separate pregnant and empty ewes
6	Balanced pregnancy feeding; hoof trimming; review feed stock and expenses
7	Raise feeding in late pregnancy; prepare the lambing pen; pre-lambing vaccines if your vet recommends them
8	Lambing: colostrum, record lambs and twins, watch the ewes
9	Nursing: weigh lambs, watch for diarrhoea and pneumonia
10	Wean at about 2 to 3 months; move males to fattening
11	Fatten and sell; choose replacement ewe lambs; cull weak ewes
12	Year review: cost per head, sales, deaths, and the next mating plan

Frequently asked questions

How many sheep should a beginner start with?

Most beginners start with about 20 to 50 ewes and one ram. That is enough to learn every stage of the year while keeping losses limited if mistakes happen.

How long is a sheep pregnant?

About 147 days, usually between 142 and 152 days. Count back from your target selling date or season to choose when to put the ram in.

Is fattening or breeding better for a beginner?

Fattening turns money over faster but depends heavily on buying prices and feed cost, while breeding is slower but builds your own flock. Choose one goal, learn it well, then expand.

How do I know a sheep is healthy before buying?

Check teeth, udder, feet, walking, body condition, eyes and nose, and ask about past vaccinations. Then quarantine new animals for about 3 to 4 weeks before mixing.

Animal register

Tag no.	Colour	Sex	Breed	Birth date	Mother	Father	Weight	Notes

Copy the page when it is full, or log the same data in Throf so the reports are worked out for you.

Mating and lambing log

Ewe no.	Ram	Mating date	Due date	Lambing date	No. born	Lamb tags	Notes

Copy the page when it is full, or log the same data in Throf so the reports are worked out for you.

Vaccination and treatment log

Date	Tag / group	Vaccine or treatment	As prescribed by vet	Next dose	Done by

Copy the page when it is full, or log the same data in Throf so the reports are worked out for you.

Weights and feed log

Date	Tag / group	Weight	Feed type	Quantity (kg)	Notes

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Expenses and sales log

Date	Item	Expense	Sale	Head	Buyer / supplier	Notes

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