

Dairy Cattle

Bos taurus · Dairy breed

DIFFICULTY Demanding

TYPE Livestock, kept for milk

PRODUCTIVE LIFE Milking after calving, around 280 days per lactation



SPACE

Shelter/yard
15m²+, minimum
0.4–1 hectare
grazing per cow,
more in drier
regions



DIET

**Pasture + hay +
dairy
concentrate
while milking**



WATER

**Constant fresh
access, high
intake while
lactating — 60–
100+ litres/day**



TEMPERAMENT

**Calm with
regular handling,
large animal to
manage**



LIFESPAN

15–20 years

01 Scale, not a big goat

A house cow produces far more milk than a dairy goat — often more than a household can drink fresh, which is why cheese and butter making become a normal part of keeping one, not an optional extra.



dairy cow



dairy goat, for scale

02 Housing & setup

SHELTER	Open-sided shed or shelter for shade and rain protection — cattle tolerate cold well but need shade in hot weather.
FENCING	Sturdy fencing, stronger than what suffices for goats or sheep — a full-size cow can push through weak fencing without much effort.
MILKING AREA	A dedicated, clean, easily washed area for twice-daily milking, ideally with basic restraint like a head bail.

04 Health & problems

- **Mastitis** — keep milking routine consistent and udders clean; a risk given the scale of production.
- **Bloat** — from sudden access to rich, wet pasture; introduce new feed gradually.
- **Lameness** — monitor hooves and walking surfaces, especially in wet conditions.
- **Milk fever** — a calcium deficiency risk around calving; discuss preventive management with a vet before the first calving.

03 Daily care

- Milk twice daily at consistent times — irregular timing affects both yield and udder health.
- Provide quality pasture plus hay, especially over drier months.
- Check body condition regularly — a lactating cow's needs shift noticeably through the lactation cycle.
- Keep at least one companion animal — cattle are herd animals and do poorly kept fully alone.

05 Production & harvest

YIELD	Often 15+ litres of milk per day at peak lactation for a smaller dairy breed (Jersey, Dexter), more than most households can use fresh.
MILKING	Twice daily, roughly 12 hours apart.
LACTATION	Around 280 days following calving, then a dry period before the next calving.
STORAGE	Fresh milk in the fridge about a week; given the volume produced, most households turn much of it into cheese, butter, or yoghurt.

06 Compatibility & considerations

GOOD WITH

Other cattle or a companion animal
(herd animals, need company)

Larger, well-fenced properties

AVOID KEEPING WITH

Being kept fully alone

Undersized blocks without grazing
capacity

NOTE

A house cow is a bigger commitment than a dairy goat in every sense — space, fencing, feed, and daily milk volume all scale up substantially. Worth honestly weighing against a goat before committing.