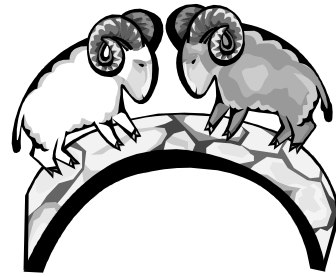


Ram Management 101

By Karen Lobb



Rams can be charming. They can also be a royal pain. Below are answers to some of the most common questions asked when rams are NOT being charming...

How do you prevent a ram from being aggressive toward you?

Your best bet is to start early when he's a lamb. No matter how cute he is, resist the urge to pet him and don't feed him grain from your hand or from a bucket you're holding. Be particularly careful with a bottle-fed ram. Often the best course of action with a bottle-fed ram lamb is to neuter him young. That allows you to get him as tame as you want without the risk of having him turn aggressive as he matures.

As rams get older don't pet or scratch them on the head, horns or face. If you feel compelled to pet a mature ram do it under the chin so that he won't be able to lower his head on you. Even the most docile ram has the potential to be dangerous so always be sure you know where your ram is when you're in the pasture with him. Bottom line, a ram that respects you and doesn't prefer to be near you is unlikely to be aggressive toward you.

How do you stop rams from head butting each other, you, the fence posts, your barn, etc.?

An article in the June 1996 **Catch Pen**, reported that Ingrid painter has had success with using a visor (made for humans) on butting rams to prevent fighting injuries. Ram 'Ross' was relentlessly battering a younger ram, so Ingrid put a visor on Ross. The visor (with the back strap behind the horns) was placed so the ram could see only downward. Ingrid reported that the visor could be removed after a few days and the rams were usually old buddies by then.

Another option is a 'ram shield', which fits over a ram's face. The shield allows the ram to see to the side and he can still eat, graze, breed and drink but it blocks his forward vision which prevents him from being able to charge. Ram shields come in large and small, horned and polled versions and are sold by Premier for about \$20 each. Because Churro rams are smaller than most commercial breeds, the shields may need to be trimmed down to work correctly. Premier can be reached at: www.premier1supplies.com or (800) 282-6631.

Lone rams are often quite destructive due to boredom and/or loneliness. Sheep are flock animals and are happiest when housed with other sheep or animals of a similar species. A wether (neutered male), preferably with a great fleece so he's producing something useful, makes a great companion for a lone ram. Plus, once neutered, wethers generally lose the urge fight and will tend to run from the ram rather than stand and fight.

How do you introduce new rams, or reintroduce rams after breeding or shearing?

We've found a method which works well for us. We pen the rams up as tightly as possible in the corner of a stall or paddock. Basically we only give them enough room to stand up and lay down. The rams will push on each other and try to assert dominance, but since they can't back up and charge, it's difficult for them to hurt each other.

After about 24 hours, if they seem to have quit pushing and shoving, we'll let them have a bit more room. If they start fighting again we'll pen them back up tightly again. Once we're fairly certain they've all agreed on who is boss we'll turn them out.

Other ideas we've heard...

- After penning them up, spray their tails and noses with stinky perfume so they'll all smell the same (our rams prefer a rose scent :-)
- Put old tires on the floor of the stall or paddock you have them penned in so they'll have a hard time charging each other.
- If you're driving to pick up a new ram, consider taking his future pasture mate along. For the ride home pen them together snugly but safely in the trailer or stock rack then hit the road **immediately**. The motion of moving vehicle will make it hard for them to fight. After riding together for several hours they'll be pretty familiar with each other and are less likely to fight when they arrive home.