

# SHEEP — TYPES OF SHEEP

Most woolgrowers have flocks of sheep that include a variety of animals depending on their age and gender (sex).

Although woolgrowers rely mostly on adult sheep, most producers breed their own **replacement animals**. This means that at any one time a wool

producer may have a range of different animals on the property.

## Lambs

Lambs are young sheep (male and female) less than one year old, which still rely on their mother for food (milk).

## Weaners

Weaners are young sheep (male and female) which have been recently separated from their mothers as they are old enough to support themselves through grazing **pasture**.

## Hoggets

Hoggets are immature male and female sheep older than weaners but not yet adults. Although often kept through to adults, hoggets do not produce as much wool as adult sheep.

## Wethers

Wethers are adult male sheep that have been **castrated** so they cannot breed. Wethers are used for wool production.



**Ewes and lambs:** Ewes are used for wool production and to breed the future generations of sheep on a wool-producing property.

## Ewes

Ewes are mature adult female sheep. Ewes are used for breeding and for wool production.

## Rams

Rams are adult male sheep kept for breeding and for wool production. Rams may or may not have horns. Rams without horns are known as 'polled'.

## Fast facts

- A flock of sheep is usually made up of different types of animals including: ewes, rams, wethers, lambs, weaners and hoggets.
- The age of a sheep can be estimated by the number of permanent incisors (front teeth).
- A ewe may have one or more lambs each year.
- Every ewe recognises her own offspring by their smell and the noise they make.



**Ram power:** Rams are adult male sheep used for breeding and for wool production.



**Close bond:** A ewe will bond with her lamb soon after it is born.

## Reproduction

It is common for ewes to be mated to rams for the first time at about 18 months of age, depending on their breed.

Ewes are generally managed in large flocks (mobs) and there is usually one ram to every 30–80 ewes at mating, depending on the amount and quality of **pasture** available.

The **gestation period** for a ewe is 150 days — about five months. Ewes in most wool-producing enterprises lamb once a year and usually give birth to a single lamb, although twins are common. Triplets can occur, but not often.

## Lambing

As they get close to lambing, ewes look for a sheltered spot, away from the other ewes, in the paddock to give birth.

Unlike humans, lambs can stand and walk soon after birth. As soon as they stand, lambs seek out the ewe's udder for their first drink of milk. This first milk is called colostrum and contains high levels of nutrients and **antibodies** to give the newborn lamb strength and protection against disease.

In the first few minutes of life a ewe will bond with her lamb (or lambs) so she can identify them from all the other lambs in the flock. Each ewe recognises the individual smell and sound of her own offspring.

Lambs stay with their mother until they can get all their nutrition from grazing — usually when lambs are about 3–5 months old.

## Glossary

**Antibodies** — substances that protect animals against disease.

**Castrated** — male animals that have had their testicles removed, to prevent them from breeding.

**Gestation period** — the amount of time a female animal remains pregnant before giving birth.

**Pasture** — plants that are managed by farmers for livestock production.

**Replacement animals** — as animals in a flock are sold or die, replacement animals are needed to keep total flock numbers stable or to increase total flock numbers.

## Telling the age of a sheep

Teeth help indicate the age of a sheep. Sheep only have front teeth in their lower jaw.

Sheep are born without teeth, but most have eight milk teeth by the time they are two months old.

As sheep get older they lose their milk teeth, which are replaced by permanent teeth — just like humans.

Permanent teeth replace the milk teeth in pairs — first the two front teeth, followed by one either side until they have eight incisors (permanent front teeth).

As sheep grow they are known by the number of permanent front teeth they have. For example, a sheep that is about 12–18 months, with two permanent incisors is called a 'two-tooth'.

When sheep have all their permanent teeth they are called a 'full-mouth'.

Adult sheep also have 24 molar teeth at the back of the jaw, with six each side on both the top and bottom.



Milk teeth  
(lamb)



Two-tooth  
(12–18 months)



Four-tooth  
(18 months–2 yrs)



Six-tooth  
(2–3 yrs)



Full-mouth  
(adult)



**Showing your age:** This four-tooth wether is about two years old.

### More information

For more information about different types of sheep, go to:

• [learnaboutwool.com](http://learnaboutwool.com)

- Beyond the Bale: [beyondthebale.wool.com](http://beyondthebale.wool.com)
- [makingmorefromsheep.com.au](http://makingmorefromsheep.com.au)
- [woolmarklearningcentre.com](http://woolmarklearningcentre.com)

