

Making Ripples

Goat Your Yard

by Amanda Bancroft

If you're extremely allergic to poison ivy but love gardening and landscaping, perhaps you should consider "goatscaping," a term coined by the Enrichmond Foundation of Richmond, Virginia. This new trend is actually quite old, since grazing herbivores like llamas, sheep, alpacas, and even guinea pigs and rabbits have been used as lawn mowers. While tick and parasite control has been the domain of guinea fowl and chickens, goats are top dog when it comes to weed and brush removal.

Greedy Goats, located in Fayetteville, is a safe and sustainable way to rid your yard of unwanted non-native invasive plant species such as: Bush Honeysuckle, English Ivy, Multiflora Rose, Privet, Japanese Honeysuckle, Bradford Pears, Climbing Euonymus, Blackberry, Black Locust, and Poison Ivy. It seems goats eat everything except tin cans popularly depicted in cartoons.

According to their website, "Goats are the original Brush Hog." If you have unmanageable species in your yard, a vine covered fence, poison ivy growing in the children's playground, or have inaccessible brush on a steep cliff, it may be time to call in the goats. But there are some common plants that these greedy goats won't eat: grasses, Mountain Laurel, Yew, and Rhododendron. Ornamental plants can make goats sick, so they are best left to the humans to remove.

A goat wrangler will visit your site and evaluate your vegetation, then create a contract listing plants to be eaten and plants to be left alone. The goats are brought in after an electric net fence is set up in the designated area, and goats are removed once the area looks great. Greedy Goats offers both the "quick-fix" and "long-term" plans. The cost to rent the herd is five cents per square foot, with a \$100 mobilization fee and \$25 per fence set up fee. Twelve goats can eat an average of 500 sq ft per day of tall dense foliage.

Goats are becoming such a popular option for homeowners and park managers because there are so many benefits to inviting them for a feast. Instead of herbicides or machines, you get a non-toxic, eco-friendly, cost effective way to create a park-like setting that saves the environment from invasives, and is cute and entertaining to boot. Not only do goats help create fire breaks and provide free fertilizer, they also educate passersby. The families walking in the neighborhood who stumble upon some goats are suddenly introduced to concepts like native plants vs invasive non-native plants, which many people have never heard of before.

Owner Connie Rieper-Estes says that "goats just love poison ivy — it is like candy to them. And they love Chinese privet, bush honeysuckle, vine honeysuckle, Callery pear — you name it,

they'll eat it." Visit GreedyGoats.com or call (479) 422-5358 to receive a free estimate, or shop on their website for cute goat t-shirts, mugs, and invitations for your next Goat Party to watch the goats in action. Organic t-shirts are also available, and adorable.

Amanda Bancroft is a Master Naturalist and volunteers with her husband Ryan for their solar-powered online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.