

BEST PRACTICES



Goats, Sheep and Pigs...Oh, My!!

Interested? Do a web search! There are local goat rental businesses to help you use this environmentally-friendly land clearing method. As with any business, be sure to check references of their work.

Since the early 1990's, the West Coast has seen a surge in using goats for land clearing. Goats are natural browsers, preferring to eat leaves, twigs, vines and shrubs. They are agile and will get up on their hind legs to reach a tasty treat, as well as sure-footed on steep slopes and rocky terrain. Since they will eat just about anything, they should not be used in areas where there are plants that are not meant to be eaten. Fencing off plants isn't always effective since goats are clever and can find ways to bypass a fence or other barrier. Stormwater ponds with steep sides, the type that are fenced and not landscaped, are perfect for goats. Other potential sites for using goats for clearing include hillsides, fence lines and disturbed sites that are overgrown with blackberries and other invasive weeds.



Goat renters have become busy thriving businesses, with government, military, commercial and residential customers all wanting natural vegetation control.

Why use animals for vegetation control?

- Goats clear the land without burning fossil fuels and making lots of noise.
- Goats can replace herbicides and/or power equipment.
- Goats will eat Himalayan blackberry, Scotch broom, English ivy and horsetail, to name a few common invasive weeds that can occupy disturbed sites.
- Goats can graze on slopes and other tricky areas where people and equipment cannot get to.
- Goat hoofs can aerate the soil, and their droppings add fertilizer to soils that are devoid of nutrients.
- Goats do not compact the soil the way that heavy equipment does.
- Goats eat and digest flowers, seeds, leaves and stems of plants. Weed wackers just cut them up into small pieces and scatter them.
- Pigs can be brought to the site after the goats to root out blackberries.
- When the vegetation is grassy, sheep are preferred for grazing on the short, tender grasses, clovers and forbs close to the soil.
- Goats, sheep and pigs are a great neighborhood or community attraction!
- Goats, sheep and pigs can be useful for site preparation for environmental restorations, large and small, as well as for maintaining stormwater ponds.

There are two ways to hire goats: either hire two or more for the season, or a shorter amount of time, with the home or business owner keeping an eye on the goats, together with weekly visits by the company. Or hire a herd of

20 to 100 goats to get a big job done quickly. When renting a herd of goats and/or installing temporary fencing to confine the goats to a particular area, wranglers stay with the goats around the clock to ensure the safety and health of the goats, and that they are not causing problems, such as eating the wrong plant or compacting the soil, and/or getting loose.

There can be negative effects from using goats: they can eat the cherished plants in the garden accidentally, they can overgraze, and compact the soil and cause erosion problems. Be aware of these potential problems and plan accordingly. If you are interested in trying goats, sheep or pigs for vegetation management, be sure to check references to ensure that you select a company with good practices.

Source: Stream Team News, Spring 2012