



Integrated Pest Management

Ways to Control Weeds- Grazing and browsing animals

Weed Control With Animals

Animal grazing or browsing for control of weeds is sometimes employed to control invasive plants, particularly on large sites such as preserves, forests or rangeland. Grazing animals may be especially useful in areas where equipment access is difficult. Their effect is similar to mowing, but the grazing animals can work among difficult terrain and can sometimes show varying degrees of selectivity as to plant targets. By themselves, grazing animals are only part of a weed control process as they will remove only the top part of weeds. Follow-up attention with other methods is usually needed to eradicate them. In most cases grazing animals will eat any edible plants available, both weeds and desirable plants. However, particularly in rangeland applications, grazing animals may apply selective pressure on certain noxious weeds allowing more desirable plants to flourish.

ANIMALS USED

Goats and sheep are two commonly used herbivores used to control weeds. Goats are natural browsers, preferring to eat leaves, twigs, bark and vines. They are very agile and can stand on their hind legs to get to their food. Sheep are grazers, preferring to eat short grass and clover. They can graze very close to the soil surface. Both of these animals appear to be able to neutralize many of the naturally occurring toxic plant chemicals that are present in some weeds.

PRECAUTIONS

Grazing animals should be used with care, as they can cause significant damage to soils, damage desirable plants, and may aid in the spread of invasive weeds. Overgrazing can reduce native plant cover and weaken native communities, allowing even more exotic weeds to invade. Also, animals that are moved from pasture to pasture may spread invasive plant seeds from one site to the next.

The proper containment and timely movement of grazers within and between infested areas is necessary for successful weed management. Temporary fencing erected to contain animals in a particular area is usually required for goats and sheep. Availability of grazing animals to use for weed control can also be a problem. And for best results, animal herds that specialize in invasive weed control should be the first choice when bringing in these mobile mowers.



DISCLAIMER

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