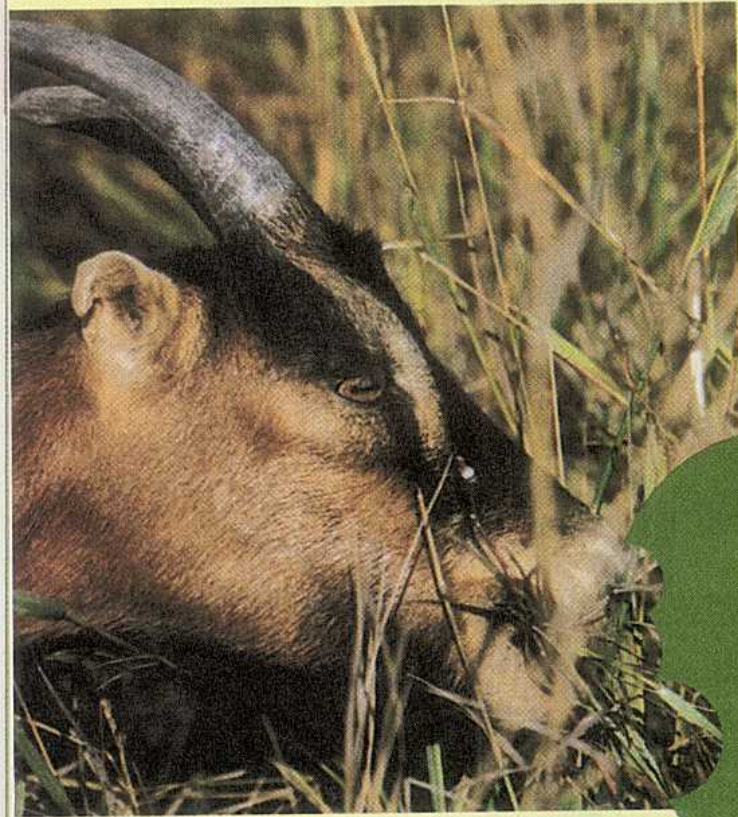


# Munching Mowers

By Cheryl M. Reifsnyder, Ph.D.



Mealtime is work time for some goats.

by themselves, work quietly, and don't pollute. Their hooves help loosen and mix the dirt. Their manure even provides food for the plants.

Meanwhile, the goats have a tasty lunch.

Goats belong to a group of animals called *ruminants*.

These animals have four-part stomachs that can break down tough plants. So they can live on plants that most animals do not eat. Cows, sheep,

**M**unching mowers trim weeds beside the path. They work through brush taller than their shoulders, and on banks steeper than sled hills. Lawn mowers? No, goats. Here in Boulder, Colorado, goats do what is usually lawn-mower work.

**Rip-munch!**  
**Rip-munch!**

These goats are good climbers. They will do a better job clearing the steep, rocky hillside than a regular mower. Also, the goats move



The goats' owner, Jim, herds his flock on a hillside in Boulder, Colorado.

deer, and giraffes are also ruminants. Even among these expert plant eaters, goats are the best munching mowers.

Different ruminants eat different things. Cows prefer soft, green grasses. Sheep love to nibble sagebrush, and deer will pick flowers off some plants the way a person might lick frosting from a cake.

Goats have special saliva that lets them eat weeds that make most other animals sick. They'll munch bitter-tasting bark, leaves, and thorny shrubs. Because they will eat almost anything, they can trim most plants.

Some cities use goats to control brush that might otherwise catch fire. Here in Boulder, the munching mowers control weeds that crowd out other plants. Goats like weeds and will often eat them before other plants.

The goats' owner is named Jim Guggenhime. "Away to me!" he shouts. His command tells Queenie, a border collie, to bring the goats toward him. I ask Jim if his goats will really eat anything.

"No," Jim answers. "They won't eat boots, for example. That's an old tale. And they won't eat any kind of mint.



Munching mowers eat a Russian olive tree, a tree that keeps wanted plants from growing.

They don't like it."

Should you get a goat to mow your lawn? Probably not. A hungry goat would quickly turn your yard into a bare

patch of dirt. If goats eat too long in one place, they will pull up grass roots and tree seedlings. In some countries, goats have been blamed for destroying entire forests.

For cities across the United States, though, goats are ideal weed eaters, as long as goatherds make sure that they don't eat too long in one spot. Do the goats mind staying out for hours, working as

munching mowers? Not at all. For the goats, going to work is like going out for dinner—a real treat. 🐐

## Should you get a goat to mow your lawn?

