



Green Gig For Goats

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY MARK CHESTER

Highfield Hall & Gardens hires four-legged crew to mow down invasive weeds

Clove, Cinnamon, Nutmeg and Pie climbed out of the van to survey their new work site at Highfield Hall & Gardens in Falmouth. The four male Nubian goats are “employed” by The Goatscaping Company.

Highfield’s landscape director Terry Soares hired Jim Cormier’s four-legged crew last May to mow down a quarter acre of hilly, rocky terrain, which presented problems for

conventional mowing machinery. It was a field day for these friendly creatures as they chewed their way through barberry, poison ivy and other invasive weeds. The regular season for goats-as-machines is from May to September, when they can be hired for \$700 a week. After Sept. 30 and prior to May 1, the cost is \$500 per week.

Some plants are toxic to goats—verbascum, milkweed and



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lily of the valley—and they will instinctively avoid them, says Soares, as she walked the designated area with Cormier, their “agent-handler.”

Prior to releasing the goats on the premises, Cormier first establishes the fence perimeter by measuring the area with a wheel device. For the Highfield job, he used 360 feet of fencing, standing four-feet high. The electric fence, with a warning sign in six languages, is electric-powered by a solar battery. A shelter is provided for the goats where they sleep at night and the client supplies water.

“The goats love rocky terrain,” says Cormier. “They shave the foliage with their bottom teeth and chew with their top gums. The Nubian breed can start working at six months old, but generally the goats are hired at the age of 1, according to Cormier.

At the end of the week, Soares was satisfied. “Unfortunately, they didn’t forage as much as we were hoping, but that was

because of the rainy weather.” The goats focused more under the trees, which provided a canopy.

Soares, who also owns Soares Flower Garden Nursery, would consider using goats again, but during late June and early July when most plants are in bloom. “The goats were definitely a novelty and drew many people to Highfield, to view the art exhibitions and tour the facility as well,” she says. “I was just astounded by how much attention they received.”

The Goatscaping Company, P.O. Box 1008, Duxbury, 617-283-4088, gogrengoat.com

Editor’s note: Photographs of Mark Chester’s forthcoming book, “The Bay State: A Multicultural Landscape, Photographs of New Americans,” is traveling the state at libraries, art centers and municipal buildings, to celebrate Massachusetts’ cultural diversity.