

**MORRIS**

# 'Goats at Work:' Morris County town hires herd to help park overrun with invasive species

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The goats were back for lunch in Morris County. On the menu: fighting invasive species like Japanese knotweed and mugwort that might otherwise have to be controlled by chemicals.

For the second year in a row, the borough of [Morris Plains](#) hired a herd of goats this summer to munch away at the unwanted vegetation in Community Park, where the invasives crowd out more native and desirable plants.

Like a pack of hooved and horned lawn mowers, a dozen goats spent the last two weeks chomping through overgrown areas of the park. Owner Matthew Hood, of [NeighborHood Farm](#) in Warren County, dropped off the animals at the start of their tour of duty, set up an electric fence to protect against predators and then left them to get to work.

The goal is to control invasive species and prevent them from seeding, said Nancy Critchley, the president of Morris Plains' Beautification Committee, which hired the goats. Critchley estimated the annual cost for the service at between \$3,000 and \$4,000.

Invasive plants "take up the space of native plants," she said. "And native plants are necessary for pollinators."

By taking up the space of native plants, invasive species remove the food or shelter that pollinators need, said [Cornell University's Cooperative Extension office](#).

On a sunny afternoon last week, bleats and baaaaa's rang out through Community Park as the 12 goats — brown, black, white and multicolored — chewed the scenery. Some leaned on thin trees as they stretched to reach tall leaves. The greenery was so high and thick in some spots that the goats disappeared.

This was the herd's second visit, after they spent two weeks in the park in June. They roamed in an area enclosed by a solar-powered electric fence. The goats are left on their own for the two weeks, with water to drink and a trailer for shelter. Hood, whose farm is in Asbury, checks in every two to three days.

"Goats at Work" signs lined the fence. In a news release earlier this summer, borough officials warned residents that it is "NOT a petting zoo and the electric fencing can give quite a shock."

The animals need to be in an area long enough to eat through all their favorite plants first, before they move onto species that tend to be less attractive, Hood said.

"When we put the goats in the area, you know, they eat all the candy and ice cream first, and then they move on to their vegetables," Hood said. "So you know we have to keep them in there long enough to get down to the things that they don't like quite as much."

## **Why goats?**

Critchley said the beautification committee chose goats over herbicides because it's the "least offensive way to get rid of them," and "to get things sprayed, there's a lot of legal rules."

NeighborHood Farm, which raises beef cattle and pigs and sells chicken eggs, started its traveling goat service last spring after using the animals on its own property.

The farm usually serves private land owners. Morris Plains is one of the few completed projects on public property. The company was also hired by a local school district, Hood said.

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Pricing for the service depends on the location, size of the property and ease of access for installing the fence. Hood said the goats are best for areas that are hard to get to with machines and where it would take a lot of time and energy to do the work by hand.

"We get calls all the time now," said Hood, 39. "Lots of people ended up being interested."