



The University of Vermont

From: "Emenheiser, Joe" <joe.emenheiser@uconn.edu>

Date: Friday, September 24, 2021 at 11:46 AM

To: Beth Holtzman <Beth.Holtzman@uvm.edu>

Subject: **RE: Goat grazing/browsing question**

Long story short, bracken fern is generally the most concerning. Perhaps a county forester could help with plant ID if that is still a question?

<https://www.merckvetmanual.com/toxicology/bracken-fern-poisoning/bracken-fern-poisoning-in-animals>

Lots of other extension publications available on the web.

A couple main points:

- 1) Toxicity builds up over a few weeks and is not immediately detectable.
- 2) Given other non-toxic things to eat, a goat won't generally consume enough fern to develop toxicity.

My recommendation would be to fence the wooded area, but be sure to provide plenty of hay if there's not a diversity of other plants (especially grass and non-toxic forbs) in addition to the ferns. Over time, look for ways to increase sunlight to the space and test/improve soil quality; these will help more "good plants" to grow and decrease the need for supplemental hay.

Another consideration is soil moisture – if the ferns are growing primarily because the area is poorly drained, it's important to recognize that goats really don't like to have their feet wet. There are a number of hoof and other health issues that can result from keeping them in wet areas.

Hope this helps!

Joe

Joe Emenheiser, PhD
Livestock Extension Educator, Department of
Extension <https://cahnr.uconn.edu/extension>
Teaching Responsibilities, Department of Animal
Science <http://animalscience.uconn.edu/>