

Geese 2007

We raised 30 geese at the Conservation Learning Centre (CLC) to control weeds around a hybrid poplar crop. Geese provide an environmentally friendly weed control option instead of spraying. Upon their arrival on May 8, 2007, we have raised and prepared them for living outside and weeding.

When they were young, the geese were placed in a section of the shop. We used cardboard to section them off with wood pallets covered in wood shavings for bedding. Soon they were too tall for the cardboard, they would peck holes in the cardboard, and the water would make the cardboard soggy and fall apart. The bedding was costly and would get mushy from the water. Since the bedding must be changed regularly, cost effective bedding is a must. We soon discovered hay bales were effective for sectioning off the geese and great for bedding. Hay bales are affordable, when purchased from local farmers. The water was placed on an elevated mesh, and it would run down under the pallets and onto the floor, which did not make the bedding too wet.

Geese will peck at each other especially if one goose is different from the others. This difference can be something as little as an egg part left over from hatching, or some of its feathers are not growing properly in one spot. To prevent this problem we hung a CD for the geese to peck at. Anything shiny should draw their attention and prevent boredom, and this will keep them from pecking at each other. If one goose is getting pecked at, it may be best to seclude it from the others until it grows, heals, or changes, so the others will not peck it to death.

Care must be taken to raise the geese inside to allow them to develop pinfeathers and their oil glands to begin producing oil for their feathers. This will ensure their protection against nasty outside weather. We provided both bale and wooden shelters for the geese in their fenced area. By having shelters, the geese could hide in them during bad weather conditions and windy days. We did release 1.5 week old geese outside, who may have been too young to stay outside. However, the weather was not too bad, and they survived through the nights successfully.

Heat lamps were used to maintain correct body temperatures. As the geese aged we reduced the heat, this enabled them to adjust better to outside temperatures. Since geese prefer to eat grasses, we needed to help develop their tastes for weeds. While they were raised, we brought them weeds every morning to ensure they would enjoy tasty weeds once they were released outside. Geese make great foragers and grind the weeds using their gizzards. Our geese started eating fresh weeds in their first week.

Geese make an excellent choice for this project. Not only do they enjoy consuming weeds, but they will grow quickly and live long. Geese can withstand our outdoor weather during the growing season, when weeds become a problem. Geese are more aggressive than ducks and chickens, and they can defend themselves from some predators by hissing and flapping their wings with a significant amount of force. However, they cannot defend themselves against all predators, so care must be taken to choose and install proper fencing.

This trial is a great way to determine which is more cost effective geese or spraying. The most cost for the geese comes with raising and having to fence an area to contain them. About 4-foot fencing should be used. Fencing is necessary to contain them to the area they need to weed. Geese flying away are not a concern, since domestic geese become much too fat in a short amount of time to be able to fly away. Predators are a major problem to geese in Saskatchewan, and here at the Conservation Learning Centre they are numerous. Fencing must also be brought out flat on the ground a couple feet to stop predators from digging under the fence, such as badgers. We used page-wire fencing, which proved to have too large of spacing where smaller predators could fit through. An idea would be to run cow fencing then run chicken

fencing over the cow fencing. This would have both small spacing and strength. Installing electric fencing around the initial fencing is another idea that could work to protect the geese from predators.

The geese depend on the weeds for food and nutrients, so we took care to ensure they always had enough weeds, and supplements were used when the geese did not have enough weeds to eat. It's important that the geese do not become too hungry and starve to death or start eating the farm crop. It seems geese work well around this type of crop, when cared for properly.

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