

# Snowberry

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Professors, county agents, farmers, ranchers, and truck drivers from Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota all agree that many noxious weeds originate in snowberry.

Snowberry, alias buckbrush, is a shrub standing one to three feet tall. Pink flowers appear on it in July, followed by white shiny berries. The seeds are small, white, and taste good. This can be invaluable information when checking cow dung to determine whether cows are utilizing snowberry. A Soil Conservation Service (SCS) man told me so.

**Snowberry reproduces** from seed or rootstalk to form dense patches on drawbottoms, hillsides, and river banks. Patches that are left ungrazed for a few years develop three distinct regions or plant communities. Frequently there is a circular patch with an outer ring of snowberry and grass; a middle ring of snowberry and bare ground; and an inner community where weeds (leafy spurge, nettles, Canadian thistle) are replacing the decadent snowberry. The weed seeds, introduced by wind and water, wildlife, or vehicles, germinate readily on the bare ground. The decadent snow-



*Properly grazed snowberry.*

berry is poor competition for the invaders. The bare ground may be caused by white grubs (June bug larvae) selective feeding on grass roots.

**Snowberry has some redeeming features.** During the drought of '88 snowberry was the only green thing in the pasture. It was literally the cow's salad bowl. It also controls erosion, provides wildlife habitat, and allows trees to invade grass. My goal is to use it but not kill it. My program aims to stop plant progression at the grass and snowberry, and/or to retrogress back to the grass and snowberry stage. This maximizes water and nutrient use on the site and minimizes weed invasions.

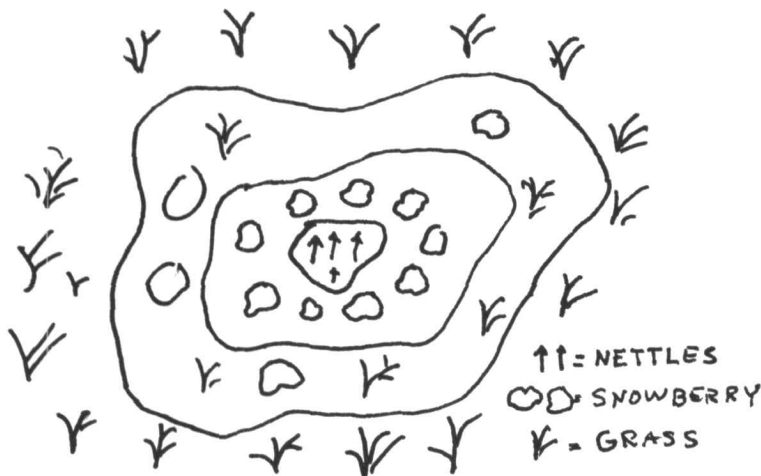
Whether cattle can be used to manage snowberry is the \$64,000 question. One of my neighbors insisted

that it is impossible. His cows did not eat snowberry. However, after considerable discussion and debate, we observed several cows and a bull eating snowberry. We concluded that snowberry was obviously better than sex. Although he still claimed there was magic involved, I believe cattle can be used to manage snowberry.

Palatability of snowberry varies greatly from one area to another. This variability is believed to be related to difference between species (3 species in Montana). When snowberry grows in less favorable conditions the leaves are a much lighter color. Cattle prefer the lighter color leaves. This may explain why snowberry in our area (Eastern Montana) is more palatable than in Minnesota or west in the mountains.

**Palatability of snowberry** can be checked by using fence lines. For example: if you have snowberry on the roadside of the fence (the forage along the road being unused) and none in the pasture, you know cows are utilizing the species. Also cows will not eat much snowberry until pasture use reaches a certain level. My cattle use snowberry when pasture utilization reaches 50% during the fall. During spring, pasture utilization has to reach 65%–70% before I see much use on snowberry.

One way of accomplishing proper utilization is to key the usage of the pasture on the snowberry. Snowberry patches should be grazed to the 60% level in as short a time period as possible. The grazing period should be



followed with a long rest (preferably two growing seasons) to allow the grasses to restore carbohydrate reserves, for seedling establishment, and for litter accumulation. More importantly, the combination of heavy use and long rest also enhances the riparian areas. Without adequate rest I do not believe that the riparian plants can successfully compete against weeds.

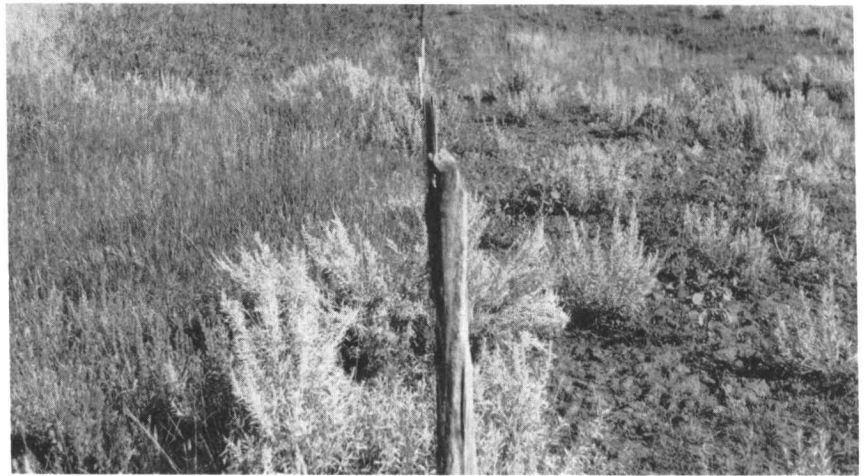
Some of the neighbors have observed an additional concern. High production cows may have to be supplemented to keep them from crashing (failure to reproduce) when using the above method of snowberry control. I have observed no problems with my herd of Herefords.

In summary: Snowberry is a forage resource. By using the pasture hard and resting it long, cattle will graze the heck of snowberry, plus control weeds.

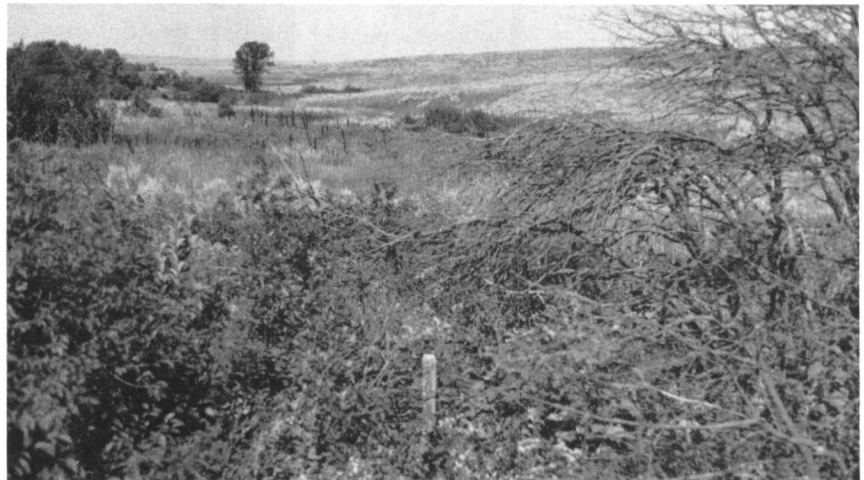
#### Literature Cited

**Lura, C.L., and P.E. Nyren. 1985.** Impact of June Bug Larvae ((White Grub) in Range Plant Communities.

**Pelton, John. 1953.** Studies on the Life History of *Symphoricarpos* Hook in Minnesota.




*Right side of road, heavy continuous grazing. Silver sage is stunted, snowberry stops at fence.*




*Fenceline on left side of road (Canadian thistle and burdock). Light seasonal grazing. Tordon killed tree.*

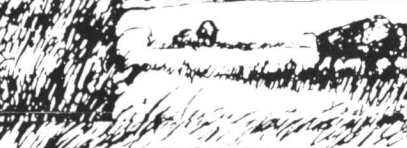
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