

Client Alert: Rhododendrons, Azaleas, and Your Goats

Goats are famous for their "iron stomachs," but there is one group of plants that can be a death sentence for your herd: the **Ericaceae** family—specifically **Rhododendrons and Azaleas**.

Because goats are natural browsers, they are often drawn to these lush, evergreen leaves, especially in winter or early spring when other forage is scarce.

Why Are They Dangerous?


These plants contain **grayanotoxins** (formerly known as andromedotoxin).

- **The Mechanism:** Grayanotoxins interfere with the sodium channels in the body's cells, essentially preventing them from "resetting." This affects the heart, the digestive tract, and the nervous system.
- **The Dosage:** As little as **0.1% of a goat's body weight** in leaves can cause severe poisoning. For a 100lb goat, that is only **1.6 ounces** of green material.

Signs of Poisoning

Symptoms usually appear within **1 to 6 hours** after ingestion. Keep a close eye out for:

Stage	Symptoms to Watch For
Early Signs	Excessive salivation (drooling), "green foam" around the mouth, and frequent swallowing.
Gastrointestinal	Intense abdominal pain, bloating, and projectile vomiting (often called "the green pukes").
Neurological	Depression, tremors, weakness, and an uncoordinated gait (ataxia).
Critical	Slow heart rate, labored breathing, seizures, and eventual collapse.

 **Note:** Goats are physiologically unable to vomit easily. If you see a goat "vomiting" green fluid, it is a medical emergency.

Immediate Action Plan

If you suspect your goat has nibbled on these plants, **do not wait for symptoms to worsen.**

1. **Remove the source:** Move the goat away from the plant immediately.
 2. **Call your Veterinarian:** There is no specific "antidote," but supportive care is highly effective if started early.
 3. **Prevent Choking:** If the goat is vomiting, keep their head low to prevent them from inhaling fluid into their lungs (aspiration pneumonia).
 4. **Activated Charcoal:** If advised by your vet, administering activated charcoal can help bind the toxins before they are absorbed.
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Prevention: Better Than a Cure

- **Identify:** Walk your fence lines. Rhododendrons have large, leathery leaves; Azaleas have smaller, thinner leaves. Both have "bell-shaped" flowers.
- **Clearance:** Maintain a 10-foot "no-go zone" between your pasture fence and any ornamental landscaping.
- **Disposal:** Never toss garden clippings over the fence into the goat pen. Even wilted or dried leaves remain toxic.

