

Additional Information Sources

Shearing

- To get names of shearers in your area, go online and enter either llama or alpaca, then shearing, then the name of your state.
- Ask other llama or alpaca breeders and owners for recommendations.

Skirting and Grading

- Check with processing mills, fiber guilds and other fiber animal owners for information.
- See what classes are available in your area.

Processing

- Use the Internet to locate processors. A simple search of “alpaca and llama fiber processors” will bring up more than 7,000 sites. Most processors will provide you with information on how they want your fiber to be prepared for processing at their mill.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT:

www.icinfo.org

www.AlpacaAcademy.com

www.camelidcare.info

www.alpacainfo.com

INFORMATION IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM YOUR LOCAL OR REGIONAL ALPACA OR LLAMA ORGANIZATION:



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the
basics
of
**Alpaca
Llama**
fiber



Camelids are sheared annually for animal health reasons and also to harvest your fiber crop. If you are going to enter a fleece contest or show, consult the governing body for rules and procedures to follow regarding those programs before beginning your shearing. Additionally, if you are sending fleece samples for testing and inclusion in an Expected Progeny Differences (EPD) program, please follow their sample collection and submission guidelines prior to shearing.

Before Shearing

Be aware of your pasture and barn environments. Clean, quality, useful fiber starts long before the fiber is harvested. Pastures should be free of burrs and weed seeds; no sawdust or wood chips should be used as bedding. If possible, feed hay from a feeder set low enough so the animals cannot pull hay down onto themselves.

Just Prior to Shearing

The animal must be dry. Clean the animal—vacuum, blow or groom according to fiber type. Be sure to acclimate animals ahead of time to the noise of grooming and shearing equipment.

Shearing

You may use either hand or electric shears. Collect the fiber type separately for each animal (by coarseness, length, color). Fiber type may also vary on an individual animal. It is essential that at least the barrel section of the animal be sheared to prevent heat stress. This is generally where the prime fleece is found. Taking off even more fiber is usually better for the animal's health and increases your fiber harvest—unless you are concerned for an unusually light fleeced animal or one that is older or compromised.

Skirting

Skirting is the removal of unwanted vegetable matter (burrs, straw, etc.) or fiber (matted, dung

tags, etc.) from the shorn fleece. Skirting enables the fiber to be as uniform as possible. Unskirted fiber adds weight and additional expense for shipping and processing.

Grading for End Product Use

Grading involves determining the quality of your fiber and allows you to decide the best use for your fiber. It increases your options because there are uses for each type and grade of fiber.

Storage

Store your fiber in sealed paper (grocery bags, leaf bags, etc.) until processing. Processing should be done as soon as possible. Deter moth infestation using cedar blocks, dried lavender sachets or dryer sheets (some of these methods may scent the fleece). Keep bags in cool, light, dry environment. (If stored in plastic, either leave open so fiber can breathe or vacuum air out.)

Processing

You may sell your raw fiber just as it comes off the animal, but when you have it processed, you add value that brings you a bigger return when you sell the product. Home processing may include washing, carding, spinning and creating a finished product (by knitting, crocheting, felting, weaving, etc.).

Mini mills and fiber cooperatives are other processing options, and you need to determine which best fits your needs. Research Internet sites that can help you learn the basics of camelid fiber processing. Make educated decisions and create a plan for the best and most profitable use of your fiber harvest. You will also learn a specific fiber art vocabulary that will be helpful when working with a mill. Arrange to visit at least one mill located fairly close to you. It will help you understand how important each step in the process is for producing a quality product.

Each step in the production process adds value to your fiber but also increases the dollar investment you have in the product. Determine the best options for your own fiber and circumstances. You may have your fiber processed into roving, batts or clouds very reasonably—these forms can be used by spinners, felters and other fiber artists. For an additional investment you may have it further processed into a variety of weights and types of yarns that can be used by those who knit, crochet or weave. Finished products—from garments to rugs—are other options, but they will require even more investment on your part.

To Sell or Not to Sell

You may retain your fiber products for your own personal use or to give as gifts. If you have—or learn—fiber art skills, you can create a variety of end products yourself.

There are consumers at every stage of the fiber process should you decide to sell your fiber. Besides those listed above, other options to explore for your fiber products are yarn shops, fiber guilds and farmers markets. Finished products can be sold at bazaars, boutiques, craft shows, on-farm shops, fiber events and fairs.

There are many options for using your llama or alpaca fiber no matter what quality or quantity you have. The possibilities are endless, but you need to determine which quality levels of fleeces you have and select potential uses that fit those levels. Contact other livestock fiber breeders who could use your product in blends. Create a unique product that no one else offers. If you want to earn some money with your fiber, the one option you don't have is to leave it stacked up in your barn.