

Preparation for alpaca shearing

Animals:

Your alpacas need to be penned up and dry in an area without bedding, and close to shearing area. If rain is called for, please put your animals inside before it starts, as shearing them wet can be both dangerous and ruin the fiber. We will decline to shear wet animals. Please do whatever you know is best to keep them as little stressed as possible. If animals are out in the field and need to be caught, there will be a surcharge.

Many owners blow out their alpacas with a cool blower (a leaf blower works fine) to remove vegetable matter and extra dust, just prior to shearing. This not only gives you a better product, but it helps keep the shearing blades cooler (working against grit and dirt wears them down and heats them up quite fast) and so more comfortable for your animal.

Shearing area:

We use a ropes tie system with mats that requires an approximate minimum space of 12' by 12'. The area should be flat and dry, and well lit. In the event of inclement weather, please let us know if you do or do not have an area to shear that is protected from the rain. If you do not have a rain-proof area and need to reschedule, we will fit you in as we can.

Manpower needed:

We travel in a team of two – shearer and head holder. We are there to perform shearing, hoof trimming, and dental trimming. The farmer's responsibilities are:

- fiber collection
- haltering and bringing the animals out to the shearing area
- taking the animal away after shearing
- sweeping up fiber in between animals to avoid cross-contamination.

A good rule of thumb is to have at least 2 people on hand for a flock of 10 or under and 3-4 people on hand for flocks larger than this. If we need to spend excess time catching and haltering animals, sorting and collecting fiber, there will be a surcharge.

Services performed:

In addition to the shearing, typically alpaca owners want to have toenails trimmed and we will take care of this unless you let us know otherwise. We can also check for long front teeth as well as fighting teeth. We use a dremel to file them down, and smooth out front and back edges for maximum comfort for the animal. While some owners wish to administer vaccines and/or deworming shots at the time of shearing, we discourage this practice. Shearing is stressful for the animal and receiving medication puts additional strain on his body. It also slows down the shearing process.

It's important for the owner to be present while the animals are being sheared. Sometimes physical conditions – scaly skin, bumps, lesions, etc. – come to light when the fleece comes off and we want to be able to alert the owner to any such things found.

We typically shear the entire body, leaving stovepipe legs, and trimming the topknot and tail just slightly to have a “poofy” but clean look. If you want a specific style of shearing, please let us know and we will work together to make sure you have the look you want.

The process:

You will bring the alpaca to the mat, and the shearer and the headholder will hold the animal and tie his legs, and stretch the animal out onto the ground. This method keeps the animals and workers safe, and it allows for removing the fleece in the most efficient method.

While shearing is happening, the fleece collector needs to be actively picking up the fleece in the three categories. We push the fiber to the side as we shear, so that the fleece collector's hands do not come anywhere near the shears. After the shearing is complete, the animal can be released. Please let the headholder know if the alpaca needs to be re-haltered and led out, or if he can be simply released. The fiber collector or another helper sweeps off the mats, while the next animal is brought to the shearing area.

The Fleece:

The fleece is removed in several stages:

- (1) The blanket (“firsts”) is removed first and set aside. This is the most valuable part of the fleece. Please let me know about any planned show fleeces.
- (2) “Thirds” are taken off the legs and belly.
- (3) “Seconds” are taken off the neck.
- (4) Clean up and final removal of leg fiber and tail fiber are also considered “thirds”.

Please have bags ready and labeled for each animal and category. Some owners mix seconds and thirds together – this is up to you. Finally, if you wish to take samples for micron testing, please have baggies ready for this and let us know before we start shearing which animals need these samples taken.

Biosecurity

We travel from farm to farm and in order to not transfer any diseases between flocks, we take the following precautions:

- (1) Wipe down mats and shoes with disinfectant
- (2) Use new shearing blades and wipe down shearing machine
- (3) Clean mouth guard and dremel for tooth trimming
- (4) Disinfect hoof trimmers

If there are any conditions your animals have that we should know about, please tell us so that we can take extra cleaning steps before travelling to the next farm.

Do's and Don'ts

DO:

- Make sure your animals are dry
- Have all animals contained in a small area
- Be ready to bring animals to the mat for shearing
- Let us know if there are special needs animals
- Let us know if there are special requests
- Have an extension cord and working electricity ready
- Wait for the shearer to push fiber aside to collect it
- Invite friends to watch
- Be prepared to pay after the service is completed.

DON'T:

- Ask the shearer to catch your animals.
- Pet your animal while we are shearing.
- Put your hands anywhere near the clippers
- Grab fiber directly from the animal
- Let dogs or small children run around in the shearing area
- Perform any action on the animal while the clippers are running (e.g. trimming toes, giving shots, etc.)
- Don't leave the shearing station to do something else.
- Expect all shearers to be the same.

Please let us know if you have any questions or special requests, and thank you for working with Shroeder Shearing.

Anne Shroeder, Shroeder Shearing

Kinder, Gentler Shearing & Care

Boysds, MD

Tel: 301-349-080

Mobile: 301-755-8400

Email: shearing@stargazingfarm.org

Web site: <http://www.stargazingfarm.org/shearing>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/shroedershearing>