

Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA)

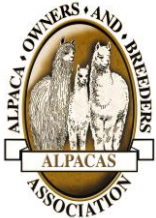
Shearing Day on an Alpaca Farm The AOBA Fiber Committee

Shearing day is the day when all our hard work comes to fruition. We have given our alpacas the best nutritional foundation we know, and have tried to keep them as clean as possible. In our desire to have fleeces that can be shown, or easily processed, the fiber committee has put together an easy outline that can be followed to help make shearing day fun and successful. Before even attempting to turn on those clippers, here are a few tips to help you get a quality fleece that will be able to go to the mill, or whatever you decide to do with it.

- 1) **Make sure your alpacas have been cleaned of all vegetable matter as much as possible.** It is much easier to remove hay, poop, and burs, while they are on the animal rather than after the shearing. Several days prior to shearing you can rinse off your alpacas to remove dust, and any mud that may be in the coat. By shearing day, your alpaca needs to be completely dry so make sure if you do rinse them you do this with ample time for them to dry out. Damp or wet fleeces are impossible to cut cleanly, will dull blades, and will matt once placed in a bag.
- 2) **Ok, so now our alpacas are clean and dry.** What comes next? Setting up your shearing area is really important so that you and all your volunteers have specific jobs. The more organized you and your volunteers are, the faster the shearing will go for the people doing the shearing and the less stress on your alpacas.
- 3) **You should have the following items:**
 - a) mats
 - b) a leaf blower (optional)
 - c) Emergency supplies, i.e. blood stop, clean bandages, antiseptic. etc.
 - d) brooms & dust pans
 - e) trash barrels
 - f) plastic bags for your clipped fleece (2 large bags & 1 pint size baggy)
 - g) small baggies for your samples that will go to the lab for histograms
 - h) sheet cloth or large paper to wrap your show fleeces
 - i) toe nail clippers
 - j) Drummel or other apparatus for doing teeth
 - k) Large labeled cloth or clear plastic bags for your fleeces (labels should have the following information: name of alpaca, color, date of shearing, date of prior shearing, age, and grade. Pre-made labels make sorting easier and less stressful.

It is much easier to quickly skirt and lightly grade your fiber during the shearing process. If you can set up a skirting table off to the side, out of the way, and have one or two volunteers skirting while others are shearing you will be surprised at how quickly you will be able to get your fleeces off to the mill or shows. Even if no one is specifically trained in grading and sorting on your farm, teaching volunteers to remove the visible vegetable matter will be a great help. They can also remove any second cuts which are easy to see at this point in time. It is really important that each fleece is kept separate from one another and that the various colors of each animal do not contaminate the fleeces. You will not want black hairs showing up in your white fleeces and vice versa. Carefully blow off the area after each alpaca has been sheared to ensure that your shearing area is as clean as possible. We suggest

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using the following categories to clip your alpacas; doing all the young whites first, then the older whites, the young fawns, then older fawns, etc. You get the idea. You will then have your fleeces somewhat already sorted by color and fineness. A simple idea that works very well for volunteers is providing them with a small micron album with fiber samples ranging from 18-32 microns. With this sample book, volunteers can work to group your fleeces by color & fineness. You'll still want to take a histogram to confirm their results.

You'll also want to set up your alpaca areas in such a way that you'll have a pen for the incoming animals, with an out pen for the those who have already been sheared. Catch or small pens are great as you can easily halter the next alpaca and bring them in for shearing. The calmer the process, the easier on everyone involved. Choose a well-experienced shearer. You may want to get some references and talk to those who have used their services. After all, shearing is expensive and you only get one fleece a year.

4) Your shearer should come with the necessary tools for tying and shearing your alpacas.

An additional service your shearer may provide are the tools for working with teeth, and should have appropriate tools to do so, (i.e. drummel). Your shearer should not be as concerned how the animal looks, but how the fleece is sheared, as in limiting 2nd cuts. Have plenty for all to drink and eat, as shearing is hard work. It's also a great way to market your farm. You may want to invite people to join you for shearing day so long as it doesn't create more stress for all involved, especially your alpacas. You may also want EZ-ups to shade the work areas.

Prepare a list of questions that would be helpful in choosing the right shearer for you.

- What type of oil they use how do you go about keeping your blades cool to keep the fiber ends from becoming burnt and how often you change blades
- Do you prefer shearing on ground or table?
- What is your average time per alpaca and cost (talk with local farmers for local market rate)
- Ask for references

5) Now sort your fleeces into groups.

Be mindful not to expose your sheared fleece to sunlight. Any moisture will heat up in the bag and cause matting, felting or mold. *At this point in time do not tie your bags shut.* See STORAGE category below.

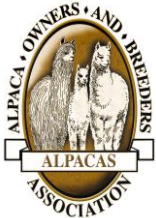
6) SHOW FLEECES:

Your show fleeces can be put in clear plastic bags to go to the shows. Be sure to label the fleece with pertinent information that you will need when entering the fleece.

Information necessary for show fleeces:

- ARI – registration certificate
- Date of shearing
- Date of prior shearing
- Owner identification
- For more specific information see show rules in AOBA show division handbook.

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For show fleeces you may enter the prime fiber which includes the blanket area and portions of the upper leg and neck that are consistent with the blanket in quality and length. Fleeces must be skirted and shall be displayed cut side out for Huacaya and cut side in for Suri.

7) SORTING:

Next separate your fleeces into groups of blankets and coarser grade fibers. Decide what you would like to do with your blankets. You may send them to a mill to be made into yarn, roving, weavings, etc. You may want to sell the raw fleeces to hand spinners who are willing to do their own carding. It's best to have determined your market prior to shearing. It will help make your decision-making process much easier. Your seconds also have a market. They may be good for a number of items depending on the quality of the fiber. Also separate by color, and quality of the fleece. Make sure that all your fleeces are between 3 and 6.5-7 inches. Depending on your mill, length matters. Most mills will not do fleeces with staples over 7 inches.

Fineness Category

Note: *Fineness categories can vary, but this is one that can be used as a general rule.*

Extra or Royal baby - under 20 micron
Fino or Fine - 20 to 22 micron
Semifino or Semifine - 23 to 25 micron
Huarizo or Adult - 26 to 28 micron
Greusa or Coarse - 29 - 32 micron

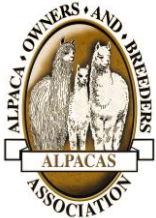
Color

White W
Light brown FN
Brown B
Dark brown DB
Black BLk
Light and dark gray G
Pink gray RG
Spotting brown MTB
Spotting black MTBLK

Medullation

Very heavy medulated fiber should be separated from the finesse category

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8) STORAGE:

There are different packaging methods. In any case; any method utilized, will require the bags to be un-stained nor contaminated in anyway. Generally, strong sacks are preferred, where the fleeces can be well pressed and easily stored.

In any case each bag must to have an individual label in which describes two kinds of information, farm identification and the other as stated above for data collection:

1. Animal Name or code number.
2. Farm name.
3. Farm address.
4. Telephone number.
5. Ari-Microchip #
6. Age of Alpaca
7. Shearing Date
8. Previous Shearing Date
9. Shearing Weight
10. Staple Length
11. Color
12. Grade/Micron

For fleeces that you choose to have stored for several months or more, you should take care to not store them in plastic bags. It is important that you find clean, cloth bags that will not hold moisture and will keep your fleeces free of any insect infestation. Keep your bags of fleece in a dry room that will be free of dust, insects, and moisture to ensure that they will not be matted by the time you are ready to process them. The quicker you can mill your fleece into roving or yarn, the better. Clean, processed fiber is easier to store and holds its quality longer provided it is store properly. Make sure you bags can breathe.

9) BIO SECURITY:

It is important the we consider the health and safety of our alpacas before the shearing process. To ensure that shearers & volunteers do not bring disease onto your farm it is necessary to think about disinfecting equipment, work boots, etc. which may carry germs or bacteria that can be transmitted from one farm to another. Consider disinfecting visitors entering and leaving your farm to reduce the spread of disease.

Happy Shearing!

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