



The British Alpaca Society

Alpaca Factsheet 1 – SHEARING

Getting organised ahead of to make the most of your fibre

This factsheet will outline aspects to consider in the weeks before shearing for the best results

- Shearing should take place once a year primarily for welfare reasons, fibre harvest is a secondary concern.
- Book your shearer early in the year, especially if it is your first year. Dates may be confirmed nearer the time.
- Check with your shearer about particular requirements such as power, anchor points and shelter etc
- Let your shearer know if you have undercover facilities to shear during wet weather.
- Ideally you should have somewhere dry to house your alpacas the day/night before and be able to provide a dry undercover area for shearing to take place. If not you may have to rebook your shearer for when the weather has improved.

Paddock Management and housing from a fibre perspective

Vegetable matter (VM) in fleeces is always undesirable and anything you can do to minimise this will produce a more saleable fleece and save you time in the long term.

- In the weeks before shearing
- Minimise seed bearing weeds as seeds invariably have hooks and are difficult to remove from fleece.
- Avoid topping or mowing to minimise grass getting stuck in fleece. • Remove hedge cuttings and cut out brambles from field edges.
- Place hay racks low to (but not on) the ground to prevent cria getting covered in seeds.
- Don't place hay on the ground and pick up loose, uneaten hay.
- Avoid bedding material such as wood shavings, saw dust and crushed stone.

Equipment list for shearing day

It is recommended you check with your providers regarding any particular requirements beforehand.

- Mains power and extension leads. Some shearers do have battery powered systems
- Anchor points for shearing ropes
- Cleaning and disinfectant solutions made up to the correct dilution
- Floor sweeping brush to sweep up fleece between animals
- Towels and absorbent paper such as kitchen roll for spit and urine
- Small sealable bags or A5 envelopes for mid side fleece samples (only two staples of fibre required)
- Large plastic or paper sheets for laying out blanket fleece as it is shorn
- Large plastic bags or paper sacks for storing skirted blanket fleece
- Additional bags for neck fibre which is typically shorter in length V 1
- Bags for collecting thirds which should be clean and dry
- Permanent marker pens for labelling bags
- Scales to weigh the fleeces for animal record purposes
- Labels for identifying fleeces which are laid flat ready for skirting
- Husbandry record sheets for making notes throughout the shearing day
- Toe nail trimmers - your shearer may provide these
- Rubbish bag for toe nails, paper towels etc
- Antibiotic spray / super glue, first aid kit

For owners with many animals, helpers are always appreciated and often necessary to assist with the follow tasks.

- To move animals to the penning area and turn them out afterwards
- To bring alpacas from the holding pen to the shearing mat
- Sweeping between each animal
- Collect and labelling fleeces of each grades
- Labelling fibre samples
- Carrying blankets away for skirting if shorn flat
- Providing refreshments
- It is customary for routine vaccinations and husbandry tasks to be completed during shearing but we are concentrating on fibre for the purpose of these notes

Additional items

- Rubber matting and knee pads for added comfort
- Skirting fleeces should be done at the time of shearing with organisation and skilled help

The day of shearing

Top tip: If your alpacas can be kept inside the night before, off the grass, they are less likely to urinate during shearing. Your alpacas must be dry for being sheared.

Your alpacas should have access to fresh water and hay all day if the shearing queue is a long one. Ideally keep them in their usual groups to minimise stress (and potential sweating).

If shearing early or late in the season, they will need shelter from very hot weather or protection from the cold. Alpacas are acclimatised to the UK however extremes of temperature post shearing can kill. Alpaca coats should be at hand for vulnerable animals who may well feel the cold having had their fibre sheared off.

Discuss and agree with your shearer what your expectations are before you get started; colour order, appearance, mid side samples, top knots, toes, teeth, who's doing what etc.

Ensure all equipment coming onto your farm is disinfected – either by your shearer or by yourselves ahead of shearing. (Clean and disinfect all equipment coming onto your farm.)

Have a list of your animals prepared and know which fleeces are likely to be for show, production, thirds etc. Taking fibre samples ahead of shearing helps with knowing what you are likely to do with each fleece.

BAS Fibre committee