

# Preparing for Shearing Day

You want your shearing day to go smoothly, right? I've prepared some tips from Tahoma Vista Fiber Mill to help it go smoothly.

Contact your shearer about a week out and confirm the appointment.

## **The day before:**

Have your animals caught up and kept in a clean place, if possible. There is nothing more annoying to a shearer than having to chase animals around the pasture.

Prepare your shearing area, making sure that it's clean and spacious.

Have both animal and human first aid kits available at the shearing site.

Prepare the bags and noodles. If you are collecting EPD samples, have the snack size bags labeled and ready to go. Prepare with markers and pens. For collection, use only clear bags, at least 33 gallon capacity. Make an index card or similar for each alpaca to include in the bag. Alpaca name and year are helpful.

Have any shots or medications drawn up and ready early the morning of shearing. You can put them in the EPD collection bags with the animal's name, for correct dosing.

Set up a cleaning station, so that you can go over the animal, removing any hay or vegetable matter that has collected on the outside of the fleece. A shop vac or even just a quick wipe with a microfiber cloth will save you hours on the skirting table. If you use a leaf blower, you risk blowing dust into the fleece, and dulling the shearer's blades.

Have a station set up to weigh the fleeces and record the fleece weight. This is also a good time to weigh your alpacas. I use a simple spreadsheet to record everything.

It is best to shear in color order, light to dark. Since we have both suris and huacayas on our farm, we group by color, sex, and type. Each alpaca is assigned a number and wears a neck chain with name and number.

## **On shearing day:**

Queue the alpacas up in numerical order, check them in at the cleaning station, and have them ready to go for the shearer.

Fiber collection:

Carefully collect the blanket first. Noodling is the preferred method, but if you bag it, please mushroom it with the tips (not the cut sides) together. We roll up the noodle, and place it into a plastic bag. Please be sure to zero your scale with the bag and noodle for accurate weights.

For the neck, leg and belly fiber, only collect what is useable for textiles. We use a laundry basket for this. My rule of thumb is only collect fiber that is 1 1/2 inches long, and not stained or hairy. You can set aside a separate bin to collect the leftovers and have the sweepings made into wool pellets (but make sure there are no toenails or trash in this bin). Weigh the collected fiber and record the weight on your spreadsheet.

Some of the younger animals have neck fiber that is good enough to even make a small batch of roving or yarn. Collect that separately if you would like.

On our farm, we put all of the useable neck, leg, and belly fiber together by color and type after it's weighed. That saves a lot of little bags from accumulating.

Weigh your freshly shorn alpaca and record the weight, and return him or her to the correct pasture.

**What if it rains on shearing day?** Your shearer may or may not be able to reschedule. If you shear wet fiber, do not close the bags tightly, and find a secure spot to leave them open to dry. If you have noodles, open them up and lay them out to dry in a secure place. Don't close up the bags until you are sure the contents are completely dry.

