

ALPACA ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

SHEARING GUIDELINES

Why is shearing important to the health and well-being of Alpacas and Llamas?

Shearing is very important for the health and well-being of alpacas and llamas because without annual clipping, their fleece continues to grow, which can cause significant heat stress in the summer. The timing of when to shear is important, as sufficient time is required to allow for re-growth of the fleece to protect them against adverse weather conditions during the winter.

It is essential to note that different shearing guidelines are recommended for each species.

How can you tell the difference between an Alpaca and a Llama?

There are a number of key differences that help to differentiate between an alpaca and a llama:

Ears: Alpacas have short spear-shaped ears while llamas have much longer, banana-shaped ears.

Size: Adult alpacas weigh between 100 and 175 pounds while adult llamas average about 250 to 400 pounds. At the shoulder, an average alpaca stands between 34 and 36 inches, while a llama ranges between 42 and 46 inches.

Faces: Llamas have a longer face; an alpaca's face is a bit more blunt. Llamas also generally do not have as much hair on their head and face as alpacas do.

Coats: Llamas have a very coarse outer coat over a softer inner coat - as opposed to the alpaca, which has a very fine, single coat.

Dispositions: Alpacas are very much herd animals, while llamas are more independent-minded. Llamas are often used as guard animals for alpacas, sheep, and other small livestock.

Shearing Guidelines for Alpacas

Major Points of Identification:

Alpacas have two different fleece types with quite different characteristics – huacaya-fleece and suri-fleece. Often the alpacas are referred to as simply huacaya or suri. The huacaya, the most common, has a crimped or wavy fleece whereas the suri has straight, lustrous, fine fibre. In full fleece, the huacaya has a full, fluffy appearance, while the suri is draped in long pencil locks.



Huacaya Alpaca



Suri Alpaca

Recommended Shearing Protocol Guidelines

- 1) The VAST majority of alpacas must be sheared annually. The exception could be alpacas with a short staple length fibre.
- 2) Alpacas in British Columbia should be sheared in April or May.

Shearing Guidelines for Llamas

There are two distinct types of llama in North America, with an infinite number of hybrids, combining the traits of the two. The shearing requirements are very different for the two species. Hybrids should be assessed on an individual basis.

Ccara or Classic Llama

Major Points of Identification:

Smooth ears: Long curved ears covered with short smooth fibre

Smooth legs: the fibre on the legs is short and smooth

Distinctive Dual-coated Body fibre: the Ccara llama is distinctively dual-coated, with long, coarse guard hair laying smoothly over a dense downy undercoat.

The protective guard hair of the Ccara acts as an umbrella against the rain and as a parasol, protecting the llama from the heat of the sun. It takes at least two years to

regrow and if shorn, a weatherproof coat will usually be necessary in the winter, to avoid unnecessary suffering.



Ccara or Classic llama

Shearing Recommendations:

Ideally, Ccara llamas should not be shorn, but should be deeply groomed in May or June each year. The soft under-down comes out easily with grooming, leaving the slow-growing, protective guard hair intact. Ccara llamas that are not groomed can develop dense mats of rotten fibre, which will ultimately require shearing or clipping. In severe cases, these mats can cause heat stress.

Fibre or Woolly Llama

Major Points of Identification:

Woolly ears: the ears tend to be covered in long fibres that curl at the tip of the ear

Woolly legs: the thick woolly coat extends most, if not all the way down the legs to the feet.

Shaggy Body fibre: The guard hair and down are almost inseparable creating a very woolly appearance. If not groomed, the coat quickly becomes shaggy and matted.

Without the protective properties of the guard hair, the fibre llama is more susceptible to effects of weather and especially, the heat of the sun.



Fibre or Woolly Llama

Shearing Recommendations:

In British Columbia, fibre llamas should be sheared each spring to allow adequate coat growth by winter and to avoid matting and heat stress during the summer.

Hybrids

Any number of hybridizations can be found between the two main species. Hybrids usually have smooth ears and smooth legs, but the body fibre lacks the distinctive dual coat of the Ccara.

Shearing Recommendations:

Hybrid llamas most frequently should be treated in the same way as fibre llamas, but may require a weatherproof coat in the first winter after shearing.

Suri Llamas

The Suri-coated llama is usually shorn or clipped once every two years and like the Ccara llama, will usually require a weatherproof coat in the first winter after shearing.

Suri llama



Additional Information or Questions

Please contact the British Columbia Llama & Alpaca Association (BCLAA) for any additional questions or information regarding other minimum standards for care as well as for contacts for shearers. Please refer to our website at www.bclaa.com. The association would be happy to help out.