

What will you do with your llama fiber?

Handspun yarn : Dyeing : Knitted : Crotched : Weaving : Felting : Needle Felting : Rugs

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A crotched and felted purse from handspun llama fiber



Finding a local fiber / spinning guild or yarn shop can provide resources, classes and a place to meet people that can assist you in your new fiber adventure. You can also create a market for your fiber and hand made products by setting up demonstrations and displays in your community. It will not be long until the “**fiber fever**” sets in and from my own experience your house will never be the same. Every spare inch of room will be filled with fiber, wheels, looms, books and patterns. It only took me a year to learn what the term “stash” means. Waiting eagerly each spring for the fiber shows to begin and add ‘just one more thing’ that I really need to my stash. Getting the entire family involved helps them understand your frenzy, or should we say passion?

Why do we shear and harvest the fiber from our llamas?

- The comfort and health of the llama and to prevent heat stress and death
- To use the versatile fiber for spinning, felting, rugs and many other uses

It is helpful to understand about llama fiber before you decide what you will make or if you choose to sell your fiber and fiber products. You don’t want the prickly fiber for a sweater or the silky slippery fiber for socks. A llama that is experiencing some type of stress, has poor nutrition or has health problems can have very weak and dull fiber. You can spend hours preparing the fiber, spinning the yarn and find it will break apart with the tension needed to weave, knit or crochet. Take time to learn about each of your llamas, touch and groom them often. This builds a relationship and most llamas like to be groomed.

Before you shear decide how you want to use the fiber from your llama. If you only want to cool the llama for summer; then you don’t have to do a lot. If you want to be able to make something from your favorite llama then a little more work is involved.

What type of fiber does your llama have? Each llama will be different. Some llamas are double coat and some single coat. Light wool, medium wool, heavy wool. Do you have a Suri or a Silky?

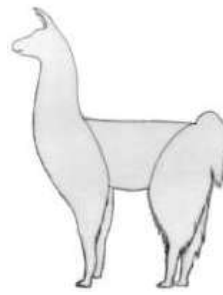
- Llamas with silky wool that lays close to the body seem to be hotter than those with a fluffy fleece. They seem to sweat more and the fiber will mat close to the skin
- Light wool llamas - their fiber is dense and the skin needs to breathe the same as a heavy wool llama. Sometimes we only shear them every other year. We use the soft down from the light wools for felting. It makes a really smooth surface
- Double coat, guard hair, course hair that sticks up, and then a soft under coat
- Single coat (soft, silky, no guard hair)
- **Is the fiber course and itchy?** Suitable for rugs or even lead ropes. Guard hair in llama fiber causes the prickle factor, or the "it itches me" factor. You can dehair your fleece by holding the fiber and pulling out the guard hair that is sticking up or some mills will do it for you
- The fine, delicate fiber that is the soft undercoat (down) is best for spinning and making products that will be close to your skin
- Can you see **Crimp** or waviness like a new perm? The crimp adds memory and loft (makes it light and airy) to your yarn that helps that sweater to not sag
- **BEFORE you shear!** Take time to blow out your llama. If you do not have a blower you can use a leaf blower (**NOT around the HEAD**), reverse your vacuum cleaner to blow out or a livestock blower can be purchased.
- **Grooming, so many ways!** We use the bristle brushes that seem to pull less and the slicker brush after some cleaning has been done. Wands and picking is also a way to remove the large debris. It is best to shampoo the llama and let the wool dry completely, then blow and brush the fleece to get the dirt and vegetable matter out of it. The dirt dulls the blades of both the scissors and shears. Clean fiber is ideal, but we don't always have the time to do it properly. Try to keep a good long length to the fiber when you take it off. **Do not snip little pieces** until you reach the desired length. The long fiber will be much easier to have spun into yarn and made into something special.

Tools Used for Shearing

- **Hand Shears:** You need a lot of practice to do a good job and need to be more careful because they are very sharp and can cut you as well as the llama.
- **Scissors:** These are easy to use and fit well in a small hand. The llamas seem to tolerate the scissors quite well. The hand shears or scissors give a bit of a scalloped effect that grows out looking very nice. Leave about ½ to 1 inch of wool on the body to protect from sunburn.
- **Electric Shears:** They are wonderful but can be quite heavy. When using electric shears, you will shear to the skin, leaving about ¼ inch on the body. The finished job is even and smooth, but keep in mind, they shear very close. So if you do not have shade and fans where the llamas can relax during the sunny hours, they could get sunburned. Apply sunscreen to prevent sunburn.



Lion Cut



Barrel Cut



Blaze a heavy wool breeding male is shown here with a **FULL body cut**, notice the shoulders, hips and neck have also been shorn. This gives a **COOL** cut for breeding males and allows the beautiful body to be seen. Donna Moore showing for Good News Llamas

Can I do it myself and what will I need? Yes a little time and patience is the key to success.

- A clean well lighted area. We like to have other llamas around if possible to help with calming the one we are shearing. **FOOD** is always a good thing too. Something to put the fiber in. A container to put your **GOOD** fiber in and a bag for your more coarse fiber.
- Some sort of restraint is helpful. A chute, small stall or coral can be used. **EXTRA** help to gather the fiber and **HOLD** the llama
- Electric shears, hand (sheep) shears or for the beginner we recommend
- Fiskars soft touch scissors that can be purchased at WalMart, JoAnn fabrics



Now you have your fiber – what next?

You can send it to a processing mill to be put into a roving or a batt

You can use hand cards or a drum carder to process your fiber

If your fiber is clean you can just spin from the locks.



How to store your fiber – everyone has their favorite way, this is what we do

- **Beware of moths**
- Skirt (separating the good from the bad) your fiber removing any debris, second cuts, belly or other course fiber, mats, burrs.
- Wash your fiber before storing if you do not send it to a processing mill, dirty fiber will attract moths. I fill my bath tub with hot water and a little dawn dish liquid. **GENTLY** push fiber in the water let soak for 15 minutes. **GENTLY** squeeze out water. Rinse the same way; do not let the water run directly on the fiber and press out the excess water. I then put the fiber in a mesh bag and put it in the washer on **SPIN CYLCE ONLY** turning off all water. Lay out to dry. **WET** fiber will mold. Store fiber away from light in a clean dry area.
- Write the llamas name, age and date of shearing on the bag. We use brown paper bags that allow the fiber to breath or we put the clean dry fiber in a plastic sealed container. We do not store for very long as our fiber is sold or used. We have found that plastic bags will draw moister and allow the fiber to sweat.

The internet has anything you ever wanted to know about fiber, grooming, spinning, knitting, felt and weaving. just “Google” !

Processing Mills:

<http://www.ovnf.com/> Ohio Valley Natural Fibers

Fiber Co-ops:

<http://www.midwestfiber.com/> Midwest Fiber Company - Ohio based

Fiber Guilds:

<http://goodnewslamas.com/fiberguild/> River Cities Fiber Clan This is our guild and we have a links page with a listing of mills, yarn shops, spinning supplies and much more

Now for any leftover fiber:

Birds love the fiber you discard on the ground to make nests

You can use your really yucky fiber for bedding for your pets. Put it in a zipped pillow case. The heat from the fiber will help keep your pet warm in the winter.

Know a fisherman? The guard hair is used in fishing lures

Crafters like the fiber for doll hair and Santa beards

Invite a 4H club, church group or just your neighbors for a **felted in a bag party!!** Just put some of the fiber in a ZIP LOCK sandwich bag, add some hot water a drop or two of dishwashing liquid and squeeze out the air, ZIP it up and RUB (agitate) for about 10 min. Keep checking and you can tell when it felts. Rinse in cold water, squeeze out excess water lay flat to dry. You can then cut out designs for a Christmas ornament, sew together to make a purse, a coaster and many other uses.

We have these beautiful hand woven rugs made from our course and shorter fiber

