

Fiber Fact Sheet

Preparing Your Llama Fleece for Show

The best way to start preparing for a fleece contest is to go through your herd looking for a fleece that you consider special a particularly nice color, one that is especially nice to the touch, or one that you just want to know more about by comparing it to others. You can enter a fleece that has been harvested already, but the best way to begin preparing a fleece for show is while it is still on the animal.

First remove large pieces of hay, etc., with spread-open fingers or a plastic curry brush. If the tips are only slightly stuck together, open them up by brushing lightly with a natural bristle brush. If the tips are matted, clip them off till the locks are free to open (as long as there is enough good fiber remaining to give you a consistent, minimum length of two to three inches).

Then use a blower to get rid of dust and as much of the small bits of vegetable matter (grass, ground up hay, etc.) as possible. This is the "dirt" that is most difficult to remove after the fleece is off the animal.

Blowing and brushing temporarily destroy the lock structure and crimp arrangement that reveal much of the character of a fleece. If you want to retain the character, try doing the major cleanup the day before shearing and/or taking the animal for a nice jog to settle down the fiber after the grooming.

It is not necessary to wash the animal. If you have done so for show competition, that is all right as long as you refrain from using grooming aids. They may make it difficult to assess the true "hand" of the fiber.

If the animal is shedding and fairly free of vegetable matter, you can harvest by combing or plucking. Sort as you comb by separating different areas into their own containers (neck wool, leg and belly wool, blanket wool).

If you are shearing, lay down a sheet or similar clean surface, decide on your preferred style of cut, and aim for consistent length and no second cuts. (If you do get second cuts, pull them off as you go and throw them in a "junk" pile.) To avoid second cuts as much as possible, go back and trim off rough spots after the shearing has been completed.

Lay the fleece out (one side at a time) on a clean surface and "skirt" it. Skirting is simply pulling off (not cutting) the "hay mow" at the base of the neck, the top line and the coarser fibers around the perimeter, as well as uneven lengths of fiber that would mar the consistency of the prime fleece. After skirting your fleece will be smaller, but it will be cleaner and of better quality.

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If the fleece will stay in one piece, turn it cut side out, fold it in thirds (sides to center), roll it up lightly from the narrow end, and carefully place it in a clear plastic bag. (Note: Do not store the fleece in plastic bags. This is only for temporary display.) If the fleece is young, short, or especially fine, it may not stay in one piece. Just pile it loosely in a clear plastic bag as you would a combed or plucked fleece.

The following excellent advice for selecting a show quality fleece comes from "The Fiberfest Magazine":

- Showing a fleece in competition is an excellent and inexpensive form of advertising. Show fleece sales often bring premium prices and repeat customers, but you must have a desirable product.
- A show fleece should possess good eye appeal, a nice handle or feel, and freshness or bloom. Color, cleanliness, consistent length of staple, and presentation are an important part of that appeal.
- To select that certain special show fleece, start with three seemingly similar fleeces. Properly skirt and roll all three. Then set them in a row next to each other in a place you have to walk by several times a day. The show fleece will be the one that catches your eye and begs you to touch it every time you pass. This is the one that will catch a judge's eye, too.