

# Alpaca Shearing

## Introduction:

Alpacas are native to high altitude areas with cool climate and low humidity in the South American Andes. They are increasing in numbers in the USA, kept mainly for fiber, but also for companionship. An adult alpaca weighing about 150 lbs produces approximately 4 lbs of high quality (<20 micron diameter) fiber and an equal amount of coarser fiber annually. Alpacas bred specifically for fiber are generally sheared once a year.

## Best Management Practices:

### Shearing Systems

Professional shearers are not numerous. People who shear sheep sometimes will also shear alpacas (as well as llamas and goats). See the section: "Sources of Information" below for suggestions as to how to find a local sheep shearer. It may be more difficult to find a professional shearer if you have only a few animals in need of shearing.

### Learning to shear

1. Watch the person who does your shearing. Ask questions.
2. Attend a demonstration at a local farm. There are increasing numbers of alpacas in Massachusetts and the University of Massachusetts Camelid Program runs a shearing school in the spring.
3. Your veterinarian may also have information about alpaca shearing or know someone to contact.

### Shearing Tips

1. A clean animal is much easier to clip/shear than a dirty one. The clippers will work better, blades will last longer, and a cleaner fleece will be the result. Clean the looser dirt out using a blower. Some people with only a few animals will wash animals a day before shearing. Others find that cleaning fleece is easier off the animal than on an uncooperative alpaca. Cleaning decisions may also be made based on requirements of the fiber processor. A commercial processor would expect debris to be removed, but washing animals would not be necessary. Note that it may take a day for a washed animal to dry, and the animal must be dry for shearing.
2. Clipping is easier than shearing, although hand shears may be used. Alpacas may be shorn with sheep shearing scissors or with electric clippers. Electric clippers are recommended if you have many animals requiring shearing. Scissors are more forgiving of mistakes. Dehairing is necessary if the fiber is to be commercially processed. The itchy coarser guard hairs are processed separately from the finer underdown.
3. Making second cuts on an already-sheared part of the animal will result in shorter fibers for further processing. This is something to be avoided as longer fibers result in higher quality yarn. Try to cut the desired length the first time.

Alpacas are native to the Andes.

The University of Massachusetts hosts a shearing school in the spring.

**Resources:**

University of Massachusetts has a Camelid Studies Program <http://www.camelidstudies.org/> which includes a shearing school <http://www.camelidstudies.org/ShearingClinic.html>

The Massachusetts Sheep and Woolcraft Fair at [www.masheepwool.org](http://www.masheepwool.org) The fair includes shearing demonstrations and is held at the Cummington Fairgrounds in Cummington, MA. Alpacas, llamas, and goats, as well as sheep, are represented at the fair.

Massachusetts 4-H at [www.mass4h.org](http://www.mass4h.org) does not have a program aimed specifically at alpacas, but does have a sheep and goat program which may be of interest to alpaca owners.

[www.sheepusa.org](http://www.sheepusa.org) has listings of alpaca as well as sheep shearers. Listings are by state, so check surrounding states if you don't come up with someone local.

<http://www.all-animals.com/shearing.html> is a commercial site

<http://www.gatewayalpacas.com/alpaca-farming/alpaca-shearing.htm> is also a commercial site

<http://www.alpacanation.com/alpaca-services/alpaca-services-2.asp?servicetype=3> has a list of alpaca shearers, including some in New England.

For more information visit [www.umass.edu/cdl](http://www.umass.edu/cdl)

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