



# Llama Shearing

**Llamas living where summers are hot need annual shearing.**

**Learn shearing by watching if you can.**

## **Introduction:**

Llamas are native to areas of high altitude and relatively cool climate with low humidity of the south American Andes. Even if you aren't interested in using or selling the fleece, the llama's health will benefit from shearing if you live where summers are hot. Llamas do vary considerably in fleece length and thickness, so the importance and frequency of shearing will depend on the individual animal as well as climate. It is important to leave at least an inch of fiber for protection from weather and sunburn. The need for skin protection varies according to the llama's skin color. Light colored skin needs more sun protection. A llama typically will need 3 inches of undercoat for winter warmth. A llama sheared to one inch in the spring should grow an adequate coat by winter. Here in Massachusetts shearing every year or two is recommended unless the llama has an unusually light coat.

## **Best Management Practices:**

### **Shearing systems**

Professional llama shearers are not numerous. People who shear sheep sometimes will also shear llamas (as well as alpacas and goats). Check the "Sources of Information" below for suggestions as to how to find a local shearer. It may be more difficult to find a professional shearer if you have only a few animals in need of shearing. Llamas are not generally shorn in such a manner that the fleece is removed in one piece; rather the fleece is separated according to quality as it is removed from the animal. This makes it easier for a novice to work slowly on an animal, even taking a break and finishing the shearing a day later if the animal becomes too nervous.

### **Learning to shear**

1. The best way to begin learning to shear is to watch someone who is good at it. Ask questions.
2. Attend a demonstration at a local farm. Llama numbers are increasing in Massachusetts and some sheep operations may have llamas to guard sheep from predators.
3. Your veterinarian may have information about llama shearing or be able to tell you who else owns llamas in your neighborhood.
4. Specific llama shearing instructions may be found at the website <http://www.phf-llamas.com/article4.html>.

### **Shearing tips**

1. A clean animal is much easier to clip/shear than a dirty one. Clippers will work better, blades will last longer, and a clean fleece will emerge, requiring less pre-processing handling. Clean out loose dirt using a blower. If you have only one or two llamas, wash the animal(s). Remember drying may take a day, and the animal must be dry for shearing.
2. Clipping is easier than shearing. Hand shears or clippers may be used. Dehairing is necessary to give a high quality processed fiber. The itchy coarser guard hairs are processed separately from the finer underdown. Llamas may be shorn with sheep shearing scissors or with electric sheep or dog clippers. Electric clippers are recommended if you have more than a few animals requiring shearing, however scissors are more forgiving of mistakes.

3. For those with time and patience, brushing may remove enough excess hair to keep the llama comfortable. Brushing will also yield vary little guard hair, so less time and effort will be needed to separate the coarse fibers from the fine. This is important if a fine fiber quality is a priority and quantity is of less importance.

**Resources:**

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

Pioneer Valley Sheep Breeders' Association at [www.pvsba.com](http://www.pvsba.com) includes llama owners as well as sheep breeders.

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

The University of Massachusetts has a Camelid program within the Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences:

<http://www.umass.edu/vasci/faculty/purdy/CamelidStudiesProgram.htm>

<http://www.phf-llamas.com/article4.html> . is an article on hand shearing of llamas. Originally found in a *Llamas Magazine* article by Sharon Beacham © Copyright 1997-1998, Pheasant Hill Farm

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

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

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