



# Guard Llama Guidelines: Recommendations for Selection & Placement of Guard Llamas

An informational article from the International Llama Registry

Llamas are successfully being utilized as guard animals for a variety of livestock species. Livestock producers using guard llamas are routinely reporting high levels of protection. However, not all llamas in all situations are successful and even excellent guard llamas may be unable to protect against two or more attacking dogs or other pack hunting predators. It is the intent of these guidelines to present information that will help producers and suppliers maximize the chances of success when placing guards in a working environment.

The information presented in this article has been collected from some of the most active and successful producers placing guard llamas today. The knowledge and experience shared in these guidelines are keys to the success of both the growth of this industry and the well-being of guard llamas and flocks.

## Selection of Candidate Llamas

Candidate llamas should be selected with care—just as you would select an animal for packing, public relations or for show competition. Some llamas lack the aptitude to be successful guards. The following characteristics should be considered when evaluating a potential guard llama:

**Age:** Llamas should always be at least 18 months of age before being placed in guard situations. Animals younger than this normally do not have the physical size and strength to ward off predators nor do they have the emotional maturity to assume the guardian role. Most customers will expect the animal to be immediately effective as a guard and most animals under 18 months are not quite ready to do this. There is no recommended upper age limit as long as the animal is in good health, conformationally sound, and still athletically capable of fulfilling intended requirements.

**Sex:** All males being sold as guard animals should be gelded. Gelding ideally should take place after the animal is 3 years of age and never before 18 months. Gelding before 2 years of age may result in abnormal skeletal development. Animals gelded as adults, many in later life, can be excellent candidates. Gelding should take place at least 90 days prior to introduction to the livestock. Non breeding females possessing the required qualities are good candidates for guards. Females with crias have been very successful. Introduction and bonding of the female to the livestock prior to the cria's birth may further increase the chances for success.

**Desirable traits:** Guard llamas should be conformationally sound and their athletic ability must match specific situation requirements. Larger flocks or open and rough terrain required greater physical demands. Natural curiosity and a high level of awareness of surroundings are desirable.

**Undesirable traits:** Animals that show little concern about surrounding activity or little interest when an unfamiliar animal approaches or enters their territory may be slow to recognize the danger of a predator. Also llamas that stay close to the barn or are reluctant to leave feeding areas, waterers, etc., as well as timid animals and those that panic easily are probably not the best candidates for guards. Some animals appear to be timid in the presence of other llamas but not in other situations. This behavior does not necessarily result in inferior guards.

**Unacceptable traits:** Llamas that are aggressive to humans may be too dangerous to place as guards because of the probably chance encounters with humans. Animals with physical problems that impair their senses such as having restricted eyesight or impaired hearing, foot, pastern, or leg problems, or those that can't effectively forage would not be acceptable as guards under typical conditions.

## **Llama Preparation**

Animals should be manageable and halter and lead trained. Remember that guard animals are working tools for the new owner and if they present more problems than they solve, they are of no value. Animals should be trained to accept the halter and should easily lead and load into a trailer.

Introduction to the target livestock by the producer is the only method that ensures that the producer has control of this singularly most critical aspect of placing guards. It is also the only way for a producer to accurately predict the reaction of his animal. Guard animals housed with target livestock prior to placement is ideal. New owners, with the best of intentions, may not have the time, the facilities or the insight for proper introduction.

Heavily woolled animals should be sheared if the new environment dictates. Toenails, vaccinations, and worming should be current.

Guard llamas that are to be used in conjunction with dogs require introduction to the actual dogs in a controlled environment. With careful selection and proper introduction this partnership can be extremely successful with both guard and shepherd dogs. However some llamas will not tolerate this and should only be used in situations where dogs will not be a factor.

## **New Owner Preparation**

New owners may be total strangers to llamas and will probably not be knowledgeable about them. Many will be reluctant to even handle them and many will try to “bully” this new creature. Neither extreme is productive. Demonstrate catching and haltering. Make sure the new owner is aware of the dangers and problems of leaving a halter on. Brief the new owner on toenail maintenance, vaccination and worming regimens, and shelter requirements (shade in summer—wind protection in winter). Describe heat stress in hot humid climates and shearing requirements when appropriate. Discuss llama nutrition and water requirements. These verbal instructions should not be a substitute for appropriate support materials.

A good llama reference book such a *Caring for Llamas and Alpacas* or *A Guide to Raising Llamas* as well as appropriate ILR educational brochures should be given to the new owner. Also include a halter, and if the animal is still growing, consider two sizes. Other items to consider providing would be medical records, ILR certificate and name and phone number of a “Llama Vet.” This phone number is important even if the new owner plans to use his own vet. Many vets not familiar with llamas will call the more experienced vet when faced with something they haven’t seen before.

## **Guarantees**

Most breeders offer a 30-day guarantee, some up to 6 months. Most are some variation of “Return the animal in the same physical condition and the breeder will replace it with a different animal.” The best guarantee the breeder can afford is recommended, when it becomes necessary to replace a guard, the new owner has probably suffered a loss of livestock. The breeder’s understanding and response in these situations is critical. Every effort should be made to reduce the number of these occasions. Careful consideration of these guidelines is an essential step in accomplishing a successful guardian placement.

## **Follow Up**

Good follow up will not only improve the success and satisfaction of the current placement but information learned by the breeder will enhance future placements. Calling the new owner one to two weeks after the guard is delivered is recommended with subsequent follow up. Maintaining a diary of results would be of great value to future studies.

*Caring for Llamas and Alpacas* by Clare Hoffmam, DVM, is available in various places online which can be found with a *Google* search.

*A Guide to Raising Llamas* by Gale Birutta, is available in various places online which can be found with a *Google* search.