



## **Preparing Your Fleece for Showing – Article 1:**

by Pamela Tait ~ ILR-SD Fleece Committee

Here are some tips on how to prepare your llama's fleece for showing in a fleece show. These are things that I have found to be helpful over the years and would like to share with other llama owners. This article pertains to double coats and some single fleeces, but does not necessarily include suri fleeces and some single coats without crimp.

The first thing to do is to prepare your fleece BEFORE you shear it. It is much, much easier to clean the fleece when the llama's skin is holding one end of the fiber than it is when both ends are loose (cut). If you are able to wash the fleece on the llama before shearing it, and if you can allow enough time before shearing in order to let the locks re-form, washing prior to shearing will eliminate a lot of the debris from the fleece. It is not always realistic to be able to wash the llama prior to shearing, but even a little bit of pre-shear grooming can save you a lot of time later.

Brushing out a fleece to remove the debris opens up the locks, allowing the debris to then fall out or be brushed out, so the fleece will need some time to regroup into its lock structure before it is shorn as a show fleece. Without that lock structure intact, the fleece will be difficult to evaluate properly during judging. So start your pre-shear grooming at least a week and up to a few weeks before you plan on shearing, depending on how much grooming needs to be done. A great time to shear llamas is after going to a show since you will have already done the bulk of the work, grooming them out and washing. Just be sure to let the locks re-form though before cutting, as we usually brush them completely out to remove the debris.



*This photo shows a llama at a show whose fleece we sheared after this photo was taken. It was very clean and well formed into locks two days after grooming and washing. The wind fluffed it well for me.*

Start by knocking the large debris off of the llama and then evaluate what it is going to take to get the fleece into show condition. Are there large sections of fleece that are matted? Is there some coting of the locks? What is the fineness? Are the lengths of fleece within the prime area consistent, or was the llama sheared around the barrel only the previous year? The answers to these questions will determine whether it should be shown as is or if it could use additional grooming and time before shearing. You can also decide at this point if it is a fleece that you want to show.

For a show fleece, the lengths of fibers within the prime fleece areas should be fairly consistent. If the staple length of the barrel area is 4 inches long and the butt area is 10 inches, this is not consistent in length. You could include both areas in the show fleece, but you will lose points for inconsistency and in this example you will lose points for having a staple length that is considered too long for commercial processing. But, you can still show the barrel area that has the 4 inches of regrowth. You may not get as many points under annualized weight, but it is still your best option. Separate the barrel area from the butt area when you shear, and that will be your show fleece. Can this be shortened to the desired length? While this can be done (carefully), it will give you an area of fleece that has two cut ends. Fibers with two cut ends are not as desirable.

When you are satisfied with the condition of your show fleece and are ready to shear, you will want to have two bags ready for each fleece as you shear it. One bag is for your show fleece and the other is your 'seconds' bag. Use your 'seconds' bag for anything that you will not be including in the show fleece to be judged. This means lower leg, chest, belly, topline, neck and any areas to be shorn not considered to be 'prime fleece'. Your 'seconds' bag can include fleece from multiple llamas if you wish, but be sure to have a separate bag for each show fleece you are shearing. This is also the bag which you can start playing with the fleece from, processing it yourself or sending it to a mill, while your show fleeces are being shown.

When you start shearing, DO NOT just let the fleece fall to the floor as you are shearing it – this will contaminate the fleece with dirt, additional vegetal matter, second cuts, belly hairs and unwanted debris. Have the area you are working in be clean from debris (hay, grain, previously shorn belly hairs, etc); mats are great for this purpose and clean up easily. The only fleece that should be allowed to hit the floor should be the belly hairs on the underside of the body, as these are much coarser and should be given to the birds for their nests. If you can have a helper there to catch the fleece as you are shearing, that is always a plus.

If you can shear larger sections together, rather than small bits here and there, that makes a nicer show fleece since the judge can lay it out and almost see the fleece as it lay on the llama. Having larger sections helps to keep the locks intact. This is not always doable since the llama usually does not like having the fleece hanging down its sides brushing against its legs, but a good helper can assist in this. Fine silky fleeces can fall apart when shearing; you will need a helper or be ready to remove one handful at a time, whenever possible. Only the dense fleeces will hold together while shearing.



*The photo above shows a complete barrel area from the left side of a llama. This was shorn by myself, with the help of a friend who held it while I kept shearing. The density of this fleece is excellent, and we got the right side shorn in one piece as well.*

As you are shearing, consider what fleece it is that you are shearing and you can pre-skirt the fleece while you shear. This means starting out with the topline fleece (the fleece along the backbone), which always contains the most amounts of vegetal matter and guard hairs. Shear the topline first and put that fleece in the 'seconds' bag. Once that fleece has been removed, you are now into your 'prime fleece'. Prime fleece is the fleece on the barrel of the body starting at the shoulder all the way to the tail and then down about halfway to the rear knees (not including the tail or back of the thigh). You will want to skirt out the fleece immediately around the armpits and the rear 'armpits' and put those areas into your 'seconds' bag. These areas contain coarser fleece and more guard hairs. As you are shearing the barrel area down towards the belly, at some point you will notice a change in fineness; skirt the coarser belly areas as well. If you pre-skirt these areas while shearing, it will save you time later and keep your show fleece from getting contaminated by debris and loose guard hairs. You may even choose to only shear the prime fleece areas first, and then go back to finish shearing the llama for comfort afterwards.

Give the shorn fleece a quick shake before it goes into the show fleece bag, as this will remove any sand and some of the second cuts. Realize that no matter how much you blow out and groom your llama before shearing, you will always have some debris, sand, dirt, etc.



*This photo shows part of the fleece shorn from the llama shown in photo 1, after it was shown numerous times.*

**DO NOT** shear ANY second cuts before you have your prime fleece bagged! If you succumb to the temptation of trying to clean up your cut while you are still shearing, those second cuts will be in your prime fleece bag and they are a real pain to remove later. Shear your prime fleece first, as well as any fleece you wish to use as fiber, and **THEN** go back and clean up your

shearing job. Second cuts clog up carder teeth and make clumps in finished yarns; avoid them from the start! Let those fall to the ground; do not put second cuts into any of your fleece bags – ever! Try not to get second cuts in the first place, as the judge will be evaluating your fleece for uniformity of length.

Once you are finished shearing, be sure to notate the name of the llama whose fleece you sheared, along with the date shorn, and either clip that to the bag or put it inside for future reference. You will need this information when you show the fleece later.

When ready, you will need to go through the fleece and pick through it a bit, removing large debris, etc, but that is another article. In the meantime, you can transfer the show fleece into a paper bag or a cardboard box for storage until you send it out to a show. This will allow the fleece to breathe a little. Be sure to protect it from clothes moths; they seem to prefer your best fleeces!

This article, as well as additional articles, can be found at:  
[http://www.lamaregistry.com/ShowDivision/ShowDivision\\_Forms.asp](http://www.lamaregistry.com/ShowDivision/ShowDivision_Forms.asp) under the Fleece section. We will be adding articles on showing fleeces, processing fleeces and some suggestions for finished fleece products this winter.

Have fun choosing your next show fleece(s), and good luck!