

East Anglia Alpaca Mill

The Orchards, Lingwood Long Lane, Beighton, Norfolk. NR13 3JU

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How to SKIRT your fleece

The aim of skirting is to create a uniform batch of clean fibre; uniform in both staple length & micron and in some instances colour too (except grey usually)

For us to process, each fleece will need to be skirted; this takes way longer to read and write than to implement so stick with it - your fleeces so deserve a little bit more of your time and attention - just like decorating, it is all in the preparation! An adult fleece should take only 15 minutes or so, a cria rather longer!

There are 4 easy steps to preparing a fleece for processing as follows:

1 - Lay the blanket out cut side down on a large (skirting) table – preferably made of mesh so that any dirt, dust, and short cuts fall through. If you can get a sense of the ‘geography’ of the fleece (where the neck, tail etc. would be), this will help but it isn’t always easy to do and is not essential.

2 - Look at the edges of the fleece – you’re looking for the ‘transition line’ around the blanket where the longer, softer fleece starts to get shorter and coarser, or where straight guard hairs are visible. For some fleeces, this is really easy to see – browns and fawns, in particular, can often be a slightly different colour as the point where the colour starts to fade is usually where the fleece quality reduces. Remove short and coarse fibres - this can be added to leg fibre.

3 - Next remove as much vegetable matter as possible – pay particular attention to the ‘crows nest’ in the centre of the blanket between the shoulders and at the bottom of the neck (more prominent in cria fleeces), which often has a lot of contamination and is best completely removed, or better still get your shearer to shear around it completely on crias. If this or any other parts of the fleece is very matted with vegetable matter or mud, just take these parts out completely– it’s worth sacrificing a small amount of fleece to avoid contaminating the rest of the batch.

You don’t have to spend hours doing this, but make sure that the fleece is reasonably tidy and you’ve taken out any larger twigs, leaves, seeds, burrs, bits of hay, toenails, faeces, your keys, needles etc

4 - You need to now gently raise and shake the edges of the fleece so any second cuts fall away and can be removed or will fall through your mesh. These second cuts are not 'seconds' but where the shearer has passed the shears twice over the same area - these second cuts can cause issues when spinning and will show as slubs in your finished yarn. Look too for any areas with guard hair and remove these. Unlike fleeces which are to be entered in shows, for processing the fleece does NOT need to stay organised so you can be heavier handed if need be, removing a handful at a time and removing VM, grit etc etc

Note:

First (cria) and some fine second fleeces may have little or no guard hair, so just remove fleece which is shorter or is less fine.

Use your hands as well as your eyes to guide you. Try putting your non-dominant hand (eg left hand) into the middle of the best blanket fibre - use your dominant hand (eg right hand) to feel around the fleece for areas which are less soft, shorter and not as good handle as the good fibre and that need removing. If it feels soft, leave it in; if it doesn’t, pull it out: it really is that simple!

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Similar to sorting the washing really!

The more consistently clean, or similar length (and colour) your fleeces are, the more consistent and higher quality your yarn will be.

Please leave fleeces in their individual bags so if need be and at your request, we can either process individually or correctly batch fleeces for you (there is a small charge for us to batch - just £1 per fleece)

There are several You Tube Videos available too (google 'skirting alpaca fleece') - none is better than others but worth watching several ahead of skirting your own fleeces. Start with your lesser quality fleeces as practice, then move to better fleeces ensuring you clean down your surface between fleeces to avoid colour contamination.

If fleeces arrive with us not suited to processing or unskirted, we will contact you with options. It is not in our interest, or yours, to process lesser quality or fibre with a high ratio of VM.

Once skirted please fill in a processing request form which can be downloaded here to accompany your fleeces - please state if batching is required. http://www.eastangliaalpacamill.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/fibre_processing_request_form.pdf

- The cost of processing includes: tumbling, scouring (washing), picking, carding, gilling, spinning, plying, and finishing to cones; skeins or balls attract a small extra charge.
- Our turnaround time varies but is at the time of writing (July 2017), 12-16 weeks but this will increase as fibre arrives. For those in a rush, we offer an Express Service at an additional cost but with a guaranteed turnaround time.
- Our pricing is per kilogramme of incoming fibre subject to the required weight of yarn (ie dk, or 4 ply) plus the cost of balls or skeins if required.
- Return postage and packing will also be added at the time of invoicing which is done via e-invoice.
- Goods are dispatched on receipt of cleared payment which we require within 7 days of billing or an additional 8% credit charge will be added. We use an overnight signed and tracked service and dispatch Monday - Thursday; guaranteed Saturday delivery is possible at extra cost.

I hope this all helps and not overloads you with info?

I am more than happy to discuss any elements which are unclear.

Please call 01493 750429 or 07762439923 during usual office hours 8.30am-6pm

Please note we are closed on Sundays.

All /any prices quoted are exclusive of VAT at the current rate and subject to change.

Website – www.EastAngliaAlpacaMill.co.uk

Email – info@alpacamill.co.uk