

# Cooling Your Alpacas... Automatically

by Bill and Sherri Duey

On hot summer afternoons, alpacas at our ranch walk over to lawn sprinkler heads installed in their pens and cool themselves off. “How,” you might ask? Read on for our helpful hint.

Keeping alpacas cool on days with high heat and humidity can be a challenge in some parts of the country. Living in southern Iowa, we are in one of those challenging regions. Yet we’ve found an economical way to address the issue of keeping our animals comfortable.

Our system utilizes lawn irrigation components commonly found at home improvement centers. Most do-it-yourself ranchers can install this system with just a few simple tools. Plastic pipes are buried under ground, shrub sprinkler heads are installed at ground level in a rubber livestock mat and an automatic timer turns the system on to spray the under side of the alpacas in their pens. The alpacas quickly learn to walk over to the sprinkler heads and stand over the mist while the system is operating. They really enjoy the cooling effect. This system works very well, due to the piping being installed underground and the rubber livestock



mats providing clean, mud-free, slip-resistant footing for the alpacas near the sprinkler heads.

Shrub sprinkler heads work the best and can be adjusted to only spray about 28 inches in the air, thus not getting the alpaca’s back and sides wet. It is important to adjust the heads to just spray the alpacas’ bellies. The system can be set up for one or more pens. A water line and electric outlet need to be within 100 feet of the installation site. A timer allows setting the start time, duration, and number of sprinkler events.

Do-it-yourself alpaca owners can perform installation by following these steps:

- Lay all parts out on top of the



ground to insure proper system layout prior to assembly. Consider number of animals, pens, sprinkler heads, etc.

- Assemble piping by cutting, cleaning, and gluing.
- Dig shallow trenches (2”-4” deep) Since the system is drained down and not used in winter, it does not have to be buried deep in the ground.
- Install pipe assembly in trench (DO NOT BURY YET).
- Install sprinkler heads temporarily (to be installed more securely after mats are in place).
- Install timer.
- Test system.
- THEN bury the piping.



In one afternoon, do-it-yourselfers can install a low-cost sprinkler system to keep their animals cool.



With the sprinkler heads temporarily installed, test the system before burying the pipes and installing the mats.



Rubber mats provide mud-free, slip-resistant footing. Drill holes for the pipes to come through, then install the sprinkler heads permanently.

- Install rubber mats – measure and drill holes for sprinkler heads, place mat over pipe, then install sprinkler heads tightly.
- Set timer options (we have found that three, 20-minute events at 1:00, 2:30 and 4:00 p.m. help to cool the alpacas periodically throughout the afternoon heat.)
- Familiarize your alpacas with the system operation.

This system takes about four to six hours to install and costs about \$105 for a complete installation for one pen. Each additional pen adds about \$55 to the total cost.

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*Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas ranch located 60 miles southeast of Des Moines. They have incorporated a number of innovative features in their alpaca ranch and are happy to share their experience in new ranch setup with alpaca owners. You may view their website at <http://www.southerniowaalpacas.com> or contact them directly at [alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com](mailto:alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com)*