

Well-planned barns and pastures, and innovative use of high- and low-tech gadgets can make life on the farm much easier. If you have any helpful "husbandry hints," *Alpacas Magazine* would love to hear from you.

■ Alpaca Fleece Skirting Table

For about \$60 and two hours of your time, you can build this fleece skirting table that works great and stores easily when not in use.

Handling fleeces at shearing time is always a challenge. New procedures and specialized pieces of equipment that help improve the process and save time are most welcome. Cleaning debris from raw fleeces and then skirting the fleece helps insure a better end product.

There are many different types of tables used for skirting alpaca fleeces. An excellent article on "Skirting Tables" was published in the Summer 2001 issue of *Alpacas Magazine*. The article has some excellent ideas on skirting tables, how to make them and the distinct features of each.

After reviewing these skirting table designs and others, we set out to design and build an even better skirting table that:

- Uses readily available components
- Is easy to assemble
- Is convenient to store
- Allows one to clean and skirt a fleece
- Does not cause damage to a blanket being prepared for show
- Is relatively inexpensive

A trip to our building supply center produced some likely candidates for components, but we quickly focused on two readily available components that make up the table: wire closet shelving (also available online) and common PVC pipe and fittings.

Simple Design, Easy to Make:

PVC pipe and fittings make up the table frame and legs. Two "close mesh" or "tight mesh" wire closet shelves make up the skirting table top. Plastic electrical ties are used to attach the two sections of wire

shelving to each other to make the table top and also to attach the table top to the PVC pipe table frame. It is that simple.

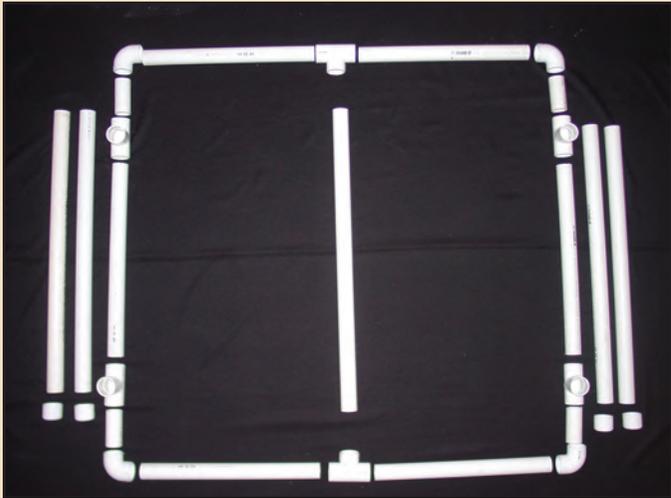
The spacing between the wires on the "close mesh" or "tight mesh" shelving is only ½ inch apart. (AFCNA in the past has recommended one inch to one and one-half inch square openings.) We have found that there are distinct advantages to the long, narrow openings. The biggest advantage to the wire shelving is that reasonably dense fleeces can be skirted for show and then slid off the table without damaging the fleece. Second cuts, dirt, sand, pea gravel, etc. fall through the wire mesh and leave the fleece in a cleaner condition.

Skirting Table Materials List

- 2- 20 inch by 48 inch, tight mesh wire closet shelves (\$9.60 each).....\$19.20
- 20- 10 inch white plastic cable ties (\$1.49 bag)\$ 1.49
- PVC cleaner (clear) (\$2.49 each)\$ 2.49
- PVC glue (clear) (\$2.16 each)\$ 2.16
- PVC pipe and glue type fittings, Schedule 40, 1 ½ inch diameter:
 - 3- 10 foot long sticks of pipe (\$5.49 each)\$16.47
 - 4- 90 degree elbows (\$1.15 each)\$ 4.60
 - 6- Ts (\$1.55 each)\$ 9.30
 - 4- Caps (\$.78 each)\$ 3.12
- Hardboard (Masonite) ½" x 40" x 48" (\$ 2.28 each).....\$ 2.28
- TOTAL MATERIAL COST\$61.10**

Assembly Procedure

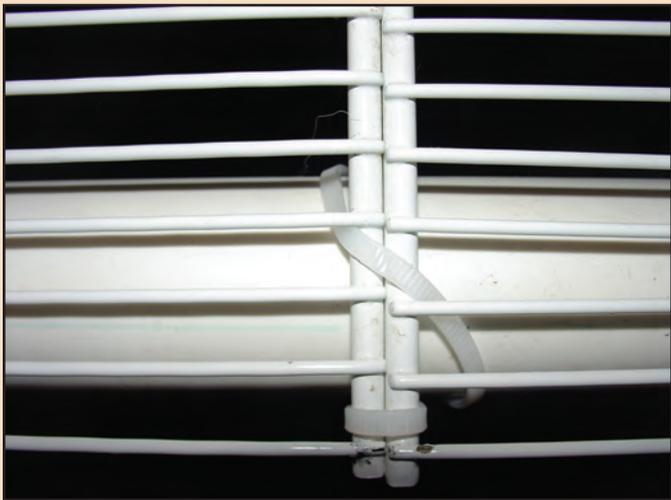
1. Cut PVC pipe lengths as follows (*note: PVC fittings may vary in size*)
 - 1- 35 inches, table frame center support
 - 4- 4 inches, short connectors, table frame ends (along 40 inch edges)



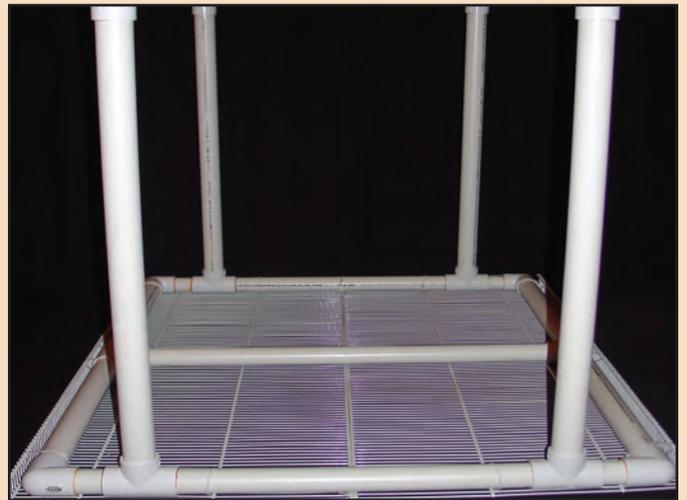
The skirting table frame and legs are made from 1 1/2 inch diameter, Schedule 40 PVC pipe and fittings. Start the project by carefully cutting the pipe to specific lengths and laying out the table top frame for assembly.



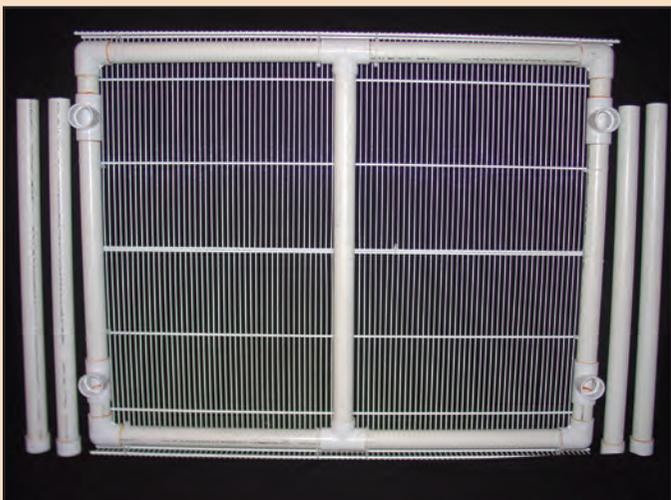
Place the wire shelving on the table frame.



Attach the two wire shelves to each other with plastic cable ties and then attach the wire shelves to the table frame with plastic cable ties.



Partially disassemble the table by picking it up and turning it upside down. Then pull the four legs out of the T's.



The table stores flat by hanging it up on a wall.



To handle fleeces use a 48" x 40" piece of 1/8" thick hardboard to transfer the blanket (cut side down) from the shearing table to the skirting table.

Husbandry Hints



Flat (36" x 24" x 4") cardboard boxes work great for storing fleece blankets to show customers.



This stack of twelve flat storage boxes holds a half blanket from twelve different alpacas.

- 2- 22 ¼ inches, table frame ends (along 40 inch edges)
4- 20 ⅞ inches, table frame (along 48 inch front and back edges)
4- 33 ½ inches, table legs
2. Assemble all components without gluing to insure understanding of assembly.
3. Set wire closet shelves on top of unglued frame to test size.
4. Disassemble.
5. Clean all fittings and pipe ends with PVC cleaner.
6. Glue pipe and fittings starting with one of the 40 inch end sections first. (Be sure to point the T's in the end sections all straight up or straight down.)
7. Assemble and glue the front and back edge units.
8. Assemble and glue the center and second 40 inch end section simultaneously.
9. Glue caps on end of each of the four leg sections.
10. Place the four leg sections in the T's on the table frame and set upright. (Note: DO NOT GLUE the table legs onto the frame if you want to be able to disassemble the legs from the frame for easy storage.)
11. Place the wire shelving on the table frame.

12. Attach the two wire shelves to each other with plastic cable ties.
13. Attach the wire shelves to the table frame with plastic cable ties.

Easy Storage

To partially disassemble: pick up the table, turn it upside down, and pull the four legs out of the T's. Store the table by hanging it up on a wall. The legs can be secured together in a bundle with a Velcro cable strap and hung up along with the table top (available at office supply stores in the computer section).

How to Use the Table

At shearing time, allow the blanket to gather on a 48" by 40" piece of ⅛" thick hardboard (Masonite) right off the shearing table or mat. Transfer the blanket from the shearing table or mat directly to the skirting table. The fleece slides smoothly off the hardboard and onto the table. A second piece of hardboard can be used to sandwich the blanket for flipping. A strip of ¼" hardboard that is 35" X 4" will help serve as a stick to slide the fleece off the board in one piece. Shaking, skirting, and picking are performed on the skirting table. The blanket can then be slide off of the skirting table and back onto the hardboard. Next, the fleece can be rolled and bagged for show. Another

option is to slide the blanket directly into a flat 36" x 24" x 4" cardboard box for storage. We store many of our fleece blankets in these boxes for showing to alpaca customers.

Optional Second Table

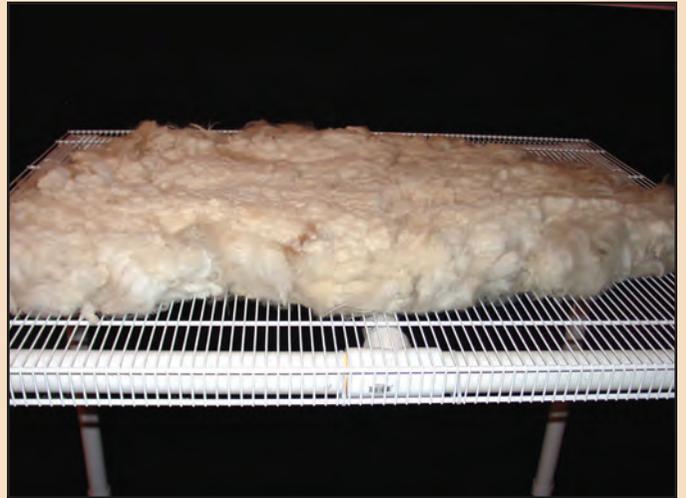
A second table really helps speed things along at fleece skirting time. We made the legs on our second table about ¼" shorter than the first so that we can slide fleeces off of one table and onto a piece of hardboard setting on the second table. The slide drop in height allows the fleece to slide without catching on the lip of the second table or the hardboard.

For about \$60 and two hours of your time, you can build this fleece skirting table that works great and stores easily when not in use. Have fun!

Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas ranch located in the hills of Southern Iowa 60 miles southeast of Des Moines. They specialize in raising Accoyo huacaya alpacas. They have incorporated innovative features into their alpaca ranch and conduct seminars on business planning, animal selection and ranch setup for new alpaca ranchers. They also enjoy helping existing ranchers learn about new products and techniques. View their site at southerniowaalpacas.com or contact them directly at alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com.



The blanket can be slid off the hardboard and onto the skirting table by using a 35" X 4" X 1/4" piece of hardboard.



Shaking, skirting, and picking can be performed on the table to a freshly sheared alpaca fleece. Second cuts, dirt, sand, pea gravel, etc. fall through the wire mesh openings and leave the fleece in a cleaner condition.



These self supporting plastic bag stands work great for holding bags for shorting various qualities of alpaca fiber.



When finished skirting, the fleece can be slid onto the hardboard and then transferred to a box, rolled up for show or placed in a bag for processing.