

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 like to hear from you.



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Husbandry Hints

“Top Ten Lists” of Equipment for Alpaca Owners

Good alpaca husbandry means using the best knowledge and tools available to care for your alpacas. We have identified three separate lists of “Top Ten” tools and equipment that correlate to the three phases of alpaca ranch development:

- a. **GETTING STARTED:** Items you need on your ranch before the first alpacas arrive.
- b. **CRIA CARE AND HERD EXPANSION:** Equipment you will need.
- c. **WISH LIST:** Equipment every seasoned alpaca rancher wants.

The Getting Started List

Getting started in the alpaca business is fun, but it can be a challenging process. Fun, because the alpacas themselves are the finest livestock in the world. It is challenging, however, because selecting, caring for, and breeding alpacas is new to most people. This list will help sort out which “tools” are most important to procure before having the first alpaca arrive at your ranch.

1. **ALPACA CARE REFERENCE BOOKS:** It is very important to have at least one great reference book for some of those questions that come up your first few years of owning alpacas. The AOBA library (aoba.org/library) has all of the alpaca care reference books you could wish to review. Check out several, select the one that you find most useful, and then buy a copy from a supplier for your bookshelf.



Straight pruners work great for trimming alpaca toe nails. The belt holster is handy and improves safe handling.



A large fan is used to cool several alpacas during high heat and humidity stress days.

2. **HALTERS AND LEADS:** This may sound elementary, but halters and leads are the first things you will need. A good quality three-way adjustable halter and light lead are best. There are some poorly designed halters out there. Buy one that is good quality and fully adjustable.
3. **FEEDERS AND HAY BUNKS:** Alpaca ranchers use many different methods of feeding their alpacas. Plastic feeding trays or rubber feeding pans work great for commercial feed. Some use a section of rain gutter as a feeding trough. Hay bunks can be as simple as a wooden, rectangular shaped box, open on the top, about twenty inches wide and twenty inches deep and large enough to hold a few flakes of hay. Commercially made steel feeders are also available.
4. **WATER SUPPLY CONTAINER:** An all-in-one heated bucket works for low cost initial startup.
5. **ALPACA BEAN SCOOP, RAKE, AND PLASTIC BUCKETS:** This set of tools is all you need to keep your pen clean of alpaca droppings on a daily basis. (See our article in *Alpacas Magazine*, Herd Sire 2003, “Alpaca Manure Management.”)
6. **TOE NAIL PRUNERS and HOLSTER:** Toe nails need to be checked and trimmed on a monthly basis. Pruners are available from alpaca equipment suppliers and work great. The belt holster made for these is very handy and is very important from a safety standpoint.
7. **LARGE VENTILATION FAN:** A forty-two inch barn fan is used to cool sev-

eral alpacas on high heat and humidity stress days. You can find these at farm supply stores and some home improvement stores. During periods of high heat and humidity, place the fan under a shed roof where it can blow across a large area of alpacas. It really moves large volumes of air.

8. COMPLETE VETERINARY SUPPLY KIT:

Purchase a tool box and fill it with all the items needed for routine and emergency alpaca care. You will have to make up your own kit as a readily made kit is not currently available as a packaged product. (*AM*, Autumn 2002, "Working with Your Vet" article has the complete list of supplies.)

9. **FENCING:** A pen can be 100' x 400' with one gate. The cost is about half materials and half labor. Do-it-yourselfers can save big on this item. (See *AM*, Summer 2002, "Alpaca Predator Resistant Fencing" article.)

10. **BARN:** An open, three-sided loafing shed 13' x 36' x 10' can serve as a minimum alpaca shelter. From here, the sky is the limit with additional barn amenities which are mostly for equipment, feed, and people shelter. Build it yourself and save about half the cost.

The Cria Care and Herd Expansion List

Once you are set up on the ranch with a few alpacas, attention soon turns to growing the herd, learning all you can, and making improvements in your operation. The care of newborn crias is a fascinating aspect of the alpaca ranching business and requires some specialized equipment. As the herd grows, saving time in husbandry activities also becomes important.

1. **CRIA CARE BOOK:** Check out the selection of neonatal (cria care) books in the AOBA library, select the one you find most helpful as a reference, and buy it from a supplier to keep in your barn.
2. **CRIA CARE KIT:** Package system available from some of the alpaca equip-



Plasma and a transfusion kit including a blunt-end infusion tube should be kept on hand during all impending births. The plasma is shipped frozen, in sealed bags, wrapped in bubble wrap and protected with a Styrofoam container. If you have a cria that needs it, having it on hand will save lots of stress on you and your vet.

ment supply companies has all you need in one grab-and-go tool box.

3. **CRIA COAT:** Cria coats help hold heat around the cria the first few days after birthing. The coats have insulated padding and fasten around the cria's neck and belly with Velcro fasteners.
4. **HEATED PET PAD:** Set the cria on the pad and the warmth helps to keep the cria from losing body heat.
5. **FROZEN PLASMA AND TRANSFUSION KIT:** Camelid plasma can be difficult to find and should be on hand for all alpaca births. Fortunately, it will last for up to two years in your freezer. Be sure to have a transfusion kit with infusion tube on hand.
6. **HERD MANAGEMENT COMPUTER SOFTWARE:** Record keeping is an important component of any herd health management program. It is amazing how fast lots of information about your alpacas will mount up. Starting out with a user friendly computer program will save you bookkeeping time and make the data readily available.
7. **SCALE:** A good digital platform scale is very useful. The scale is an important tool to help you monitor the health of each of your alpacas. Monthly weighing can often indicate changes in the health of your



Electric radiant heaters mounted to a low ceiling are safe and efficient for warming crias in wet, cool weather.

alpaca. The scale is especially helpful in monitoring the growth of crias during the first year of development.

8. **RADIANT STALL HEATER:** Electric radiant heaters are a safe, efficient type of heater to use for warming up a stall area. The heater mounts to a wall or low ceiling and radiates the heat down to the stall floor area.
9. **CORRAL PANELS:** Lightweight, portable alpaca corral panels can be stored in a barn or carried on the side of a trailer. They are very helpful for quickly forming a temporary pen around the farm and on the road.
10. **AMISH FLY TRAP:** These environmentally safe fly traps work better than any other fly control product we have tried. The system utilizes a mixture of fermenting products to attract the flies and trap them in the screened-in box. Set one in each alpaca pen near the bean pile.

The Wish List

The "Wish List" is made up of those great products that alpacas ranchers would love to have. After using each of these items for the first time they qualify for an appropriate quote "How did we ever get by without this?" or "Why did we wait so long to purchase this?" Read, wish, and give it a try.

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A digital five pound postal scale is very handy for measuring small quantities of alpaca fiber for sale or show.

1. **AUTOMATIC STAINLESS-STEEL HEATED WATER SYSTEM:** Automatic water systems pay for themselves very quickly in saving time, energy and water. (See *Alpacas Magazine*, Autumn 2001, "Water Your Alpacas... Automatically!" article.)
2. **TOOTH GRINDER:** This is the handiest dental tool to come along. An angle grinder and a custom made, spring-loaded hood over a cutting disc make up this tool. It is a must for herds with alpacas in the three- to eight-year-old category that may need annual tooth trimming.
3. **ALPACA RESTRAINT CHUTE:** We would all like to think that our alpacas would never need to be restrained, but... the time comes when it is most helpful for you and your veterinarian to have a restraint chute. A built-in-place chute can cost as little as \$300 and a ready made portable chute can run as high as \$1,200. Make sure your system includes a pair of panic snap straps and a belly band. These are critical items for the safety of your alpaca.
4. **TRAILER:** An alpaca trailer opens up a whole new world of mobility with your alpacas. Owning a trailer is not mandatory, but it can really come in handy for rushing an alpaca to a vet clinic, opening up new breeding options, and allowing you a huge choice of shows in which to participate. The trailer can be basic transportation or have all the bells and whistles you can think of. (See *AM*, Herd Sire 2002, "Alpaca Trailer Towing Tips" article.)
5. **SECURITY CAMERA SYSTEM FOR ALPACA TRAILER:** Have fun keeping an eye on your alpacas as you motor down the open road. (See *AM*, Winter 2003, "Security Cameras for Alpaca Trailers" article.)
6. **SECURITY CAMERA SYSTEM FOR ALPACA BARN:** Less expensive models (in the \$179 range) come with one camera and one monitor and are a 2.4 GHz wireless, color system, that can transmit up to 300'. Multi-camera systems are also available for more money. These systems can reduce the number of trips to the barn during "cria watch."
7. **MANURE SPREADER:** Manure handling is much easier with the proper equipment. (See *Alpacas Magazine*, Herd Sire 2003, "Alpaca Manure Management.")
8. **SHEARS, COMB, CUTTERS:** Doing your own shearing can be most enjoyable. You (or your shearer) will be grateful that you got that extra comb and cutters, too.
9. **ALPACA FIBER SKIRTING TABLE:** These tables allow for speedy skirting, sorting and bagging of fiber as it comes off the alpaca. (See *AM*, Summer 2001, "Skirting Tables" article.)
10. **DIGITAL POSTAL (FIBER) SCALE:** A digital five-pound postal scale, capable of measuring down to one tenth of an ounce is very handy for measuring small quantities of alpaca fiber for sale or show competitions. It is also handy around the office for weighing advertising materials prior to mailing.

Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas, 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 www.southerniowaalpacas.com or contact them directly at alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com.