

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.

# ■ Climate-Controlled Alpaca Stall

**A**lpaca ranchers may be faced with care of a newborn cria or a sick or injured alpaca under less than favorable weather conditions.

An area in the alpaca barn dedicated as a climate-controlled nursery stall or sick bay can greatly

increase the survival chances for the alpaca during cold or wet weather. On a cold day, this stall can also serve as a great place to do monthly shots, toenail trimming, market alpacas to ranch visitors and host your veterinarian while performing procedures on an alpaca.

This article identifies various features needed in a climate-controlled stall and describes some of the construction steps.



If you wish to use the stall in the summer, design the interior panels to be removable. Here, the stall has been opened up for summer use.

### Features

- Solid walls to block out wind and drafts
- Insulated to hold in heat during cold weather and block out heat in hot weather
- Good lighting
- Auxiliary heat
- Windows to provide ventilation
- Access to an outside pen
- Access for people to the general barn work area
- Access to an adjacent stall
- Rubber stall mats
- Water container
- Hay and feed containers
- Ability to view into the stall without having to open a door
- Wall mounted thermometer
- Remote viewing camera in the stall with a monitor in the ranch home

Almost every alpaca rancher will need a climate-controlled alpaca stall at some time.

The first task is to select a good location in the barn for the heated stall. A corner stall location can work quite well as it can be more easily insulated, usually requires fewer doors (three instead of four) and most likely will have at least one window.

Access to an outside pen run is very important. When it is time to reintroduce the alpaca to the outdoors, this access will facilitate letting the alpaca out of the stall for short periods until it is acclimated to outside weather conditions.

A door should be installed to allow access from the main part of the barn to the climate controlled stall. This will allow direct access to the stall for husbandry activities and frequent health checks.

The heated stall should also have a second door leading to an adjoining stall inside the barn to facilitate sorting and handling alpacas.

A window for natural lighting is important if an alpaca will have to be kept in the stall for an extended period of time. The challenge is making the window so that it will allow maximum air flow in the summer yet be blocked out and/or insulated in the winter.

Electrical outlets are necessary for plugging in heaters, fans, remote cameras, blow driers, and other alpaca equipment.

Lights are very important, especially if using the stall for newborn crias. Crias instinctively seek out dark areas when they first attempt to nurse. If the stall is dark and a newborn cria and mom are in the stall, the cria may try to nurse in the dark corners of the stall. With good lighting, the darkest place in the stall is underneath the dam, in her udder area. The cria instinctively will be attracted to that area.

NOTE: Consider using barn light fixtures (sometimes called "jar" lights). These fixtures have a pro-

protective glass globe that looks similar to a canning jar. The protective globe may prevent a hot shattered light bulb from falling down into hay or straw bedding and starting a fire. (Jar lights should be installed in all areas of the barn that have light bulbs above stored hay or straw, or bedding on the floor.)

Rubber stall mats provide good footing, can be covered with a layer of straw or hay in cold weather and are relatively easy to clean.

### Construction

To begin the process of installing a climate controlled stall, first install the posts for doors and the wall supports.

Next attach the board fencing and all doors.

To deal with the harsh winter climate, heat needs to be held in the stall down to the level of the alpaca. To do this, an insulated dropped ceiling needs to be

installed. Joist hangers and ceiling joists for supporting the ceiling work very well.

At this point all electrical outlets, light fixtures, switches, heaters, remote cameras, fans, etc. should be planned out and wired accordingly.

Once the wiring is complete, an OSB (oriented strand board), plywood, or sheetrock ceiling can be installed. Insulation can then be laid over the top of the ceiling.

To insulate the exterior walls, you can install solid foam insulation or fiberglass insulation, depending on the type of barn construction. Next, attach the wall covering material such as OSB, plywood, or sheet rock.

Feed tubs and water containers should be mounted up off the floor for birthing dams. A hay feed bag can be hung in one corner of the stall. That way, the newborn cria is not tripping over them or stumbling into them as it tries out its “new legs.”



Ceiling mounted radiant electric heaters work very well in alpaca stalls. Note the window at the right has been closed in and insulated for winter use.



To begin the process of installing a climate controlled stall, first install the posts for doors and the wall supports. Next, attach the board fencing and all doors.



To insulate the exterior walls, you can install solid foam insulation. The top and bottom foam panels are in place. The center foam panel will be added next.



Next, attach the wall covering material such as OSB, plywood, or sheet rock.

## Husbandry Hints

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Ceiling joist hangers are perfect for attaching the ceiling.



Ceiling joists work great for supporting the ceiling, hanging lights, running wiring, and attaching overhead heaters. The jar lights shown should be used to prevent hot broken bulbs from falling into bedding and starting a fire.



Rubber stall mats provide good footing, can be covered with a layer of straw or hay in cold weather, and are relatively easy to clean.

Exterior access doors should be insulated and have very good weather seals. Interior access doors to the stall may be designed with removable panels.

In the summer, the panels can be removed and the stall used for normal operations.

Heaters that work very well in alpaca stalls are ceiling mounted radiant electric heaters. These units are easy to install and are effective for heating a small area. They can be mounted on the stall ceiling positioned to direct the heater's rays to the alpacas and the stall floor. They do not require air movement and are up away from flammable bedding material. (See "Top Ten Lists of Equipment for Alpaca Owners," *Alpacas Magazine*, Summer 2003 issue).



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### Nice Extras

To monitor the stall air temperature at the alpaca's level, a wall-mounted thermometer should be installed about three feet off the floor on the inside wall.

A remote viewing camera mounted in the stall with a monitor in the alpaca rancher's home can relieve worries and save time. With a quick glance at the monitor, you see what is or is not happening in the climate-controlled stall (see "Closed Circuit TV Monitoring Systems for Alpaca Barns," *A.M.* Winter 2004).

### Are They Really Necessary?

Almost every alpaca rancher will need a climate-controlled alpaca stall at some time. Building and equipping the stall before it is actually needed can help relieve the stress of throwing together the stall at a time you may need to be focusing your thoughts and energy on caring for your alpaca. Be prepared, for your peace of mind and your alpacas' health considerations.

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Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas ranch located in the hills of Southern Iowa, 60 miles southeast of Des Moines. They have incorporated innovative features into their alpaca ranch and conduct seminars on business planning, animal selection, and ranch setup for new alpaca ranchers. View their site at [www.southerniowaalpacas.com](http://www.southerniowaalpacas.com) or contact them at [alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com](mailto:alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com).

### Oh No! Flat Tire! Major Bummer!

Look for "How to Change an Alpaca Trailer Tire," in our next issue.

