



HIDDEN GEM NEWS

April 2009

An informational newsletter published by Hidden Gem Ranch

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Interesting items

Most alpacas produce 5-10 pounds of fleece every year.

Fleece is measured in microns, with the majority falling between 20 and 30 microns in diameter. Fleece that is less than 20 microns is considered to be very fine.

There are 16 AOBA recognized colors of alpaca fleece.

Raw fleece can sell for up to \$5 per ounce.

Visit us on our website:

www.hiddengemranch.com

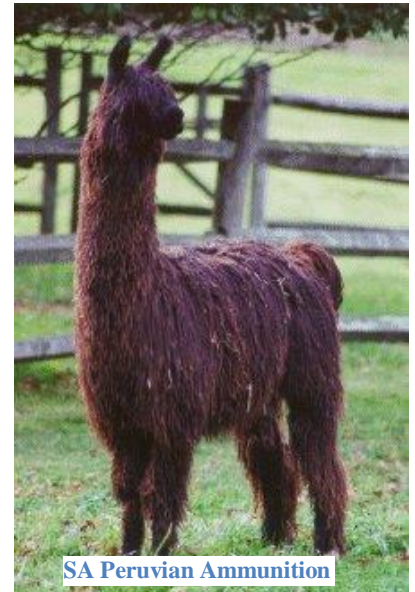
Taking it off!

As we approach the warm weather of summer, it is time to take it off, fleece that is. Alpacas fleece is 5-7 times warmer than wool so they can overheat in the summer. Most farms that we know begin shearing their animals in April or May. Our shearing dates are May 16-17 and everyone is invited to observe or participate.

At our Ranch, the shearing process begins with selecting someone to perform the shearing. You could always do the shearing yourself if you feel comfortable. We try to select a weekend in May as April weather can still be cool and Dennis is only home on weekends. We try to have everything prepared, including rounding up the animals, prior to the arrival of our shearer. This includes everything from getting the kids up, snacks and meals prepared, halters on the animals, and an area set up to be out of the weather as needed. The more people assisting makes the task easier. It takes 2 people to handle the alpaca during the shearing, an additional person to bag and clean up the shorn fleece, and at least 1 more to bring the animals to and away from the shearing area. Did we mention that you are invited to help!

As we shear the alpaca, we also trim their nails and file their teeth as needed. When we bag our shorn fleece, we separate it as firsts, seconds, or thirds. The firsts is the prime area (called the blanket) taken from the back and sides of the animal. The seconds are the neck and upper legs, and the thirds is everything else. Each bag is identified with a tag that has the animals name and date. Some farms will "skirt" their fleece during the shearing (providing there is enough help and room). Skirting consists of removing the shorter "seconds" from around the blanket, as well as any guard hairs. This is required for fiber preparation, so you can save some time by doing it during the shearing time. After our shearing has been complete, we will weigh the fleece. Fleece is the natural product from the alpaca, so as breeders, we try to produce the largest quantity of the finest fleece possible.

Alpaca fleece has many desirable characteristics. Not only is it warmer than wool. It is light in weight, soft as cashmere, hypo-allergenic, water resistant, and stronger than wool or cotton. There is no "itch" as in wool, it can be dyed easily, and the colored fiber will not fade through multiple washings. As breeders, we try



SA Peruvian Ammunition

Upcoming activities

Kentucky Classic Show
April 25-26 in Louisville, KY

Buckeye Alpaca Show
May 2-3 in Columbus, OH

Hidden Gem Ranch shearing days
May 16-17 at the Ranch

World Alpaca Conference & AOBA
National Conference and show
June 3-7 in Cleveland, OH

Next issue

Preparing and evaluating your
fleece

Contact Us

<http://www.hiddengemranch.com>

to educate people and promote the fiber. It is the main product of the alpaca, and without a demand for it, there would be no need for them. It is our mission at Hidden Gem Ranch to communicate to others about the qualities of this product in order to promote it as a substitute for other materials. As the number of alpacas increase, there will be more fleece available to support the industry, thus lowering the cost of processing. This in turn will help make products more available. Do your part and purchase some alpaca products and help us educate the community.

Happening at the Ranch

Crias, Crias, Crias! Since last month's newsletter, we had 1 cria born and 2 due at any time. Maddie had delivered our first cria this year on March 22nd. A white female! We named her Angelia as she is a little white angel. Sky and Bella are both past their due dates and we can't wait to see what they produce. Amber is scheduled to deliver on May 16th, which falls on shearing weekend. Come on out to the Ranch to watch or help with the shearing, and maybe you can be present on the special day!

We won an alpaca! Yes, won! We had entered a contest and found out that we won a bay black Suri male – SA Peruvian Ammunition. That's him pictured above. He is a Magnifico son and we brought him home on April 11th. He has won first place in the AOBA nationals and will add some new genetics and color to our farm.

We were invited to Sewanee's Trails & Trilliums spring event to participate in the petting zoo held on April 18th and to Tractor Supply's spring kickoff event on April 25th in Kimball. We enjoyed sharing our animals and telling people about the alpaca lifestyle.

Featured alpaca(s)

This month's feature is Maddie and her most recent cria Angelia. Maddie was the first female that we purchased and now she has given us 3 girls in a row (Stardust, Joy, & Angelia). She has always been an easy breeder and a great mom. Last year's cria, Joy, won first place and champion in her first show in Alabama and placed 4th in the Southern Select show last month in Tennessee. We hope to obtain similar awards with Angelia.



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