

Fencing

By Boyd & Kelly Cumming

Fencing is really more important in terms of keeping predators and unwanted visitors (deer, moose, elk etc. which all can carry communicable diseases and parasites) out than keeping alpacas or llamas inside. If your pasture looks better than what is outside, they walk right through any fence. Deer simply leap over. Fencing doesn't exist in llamas or alpacas native South American environment so they have no concept of a fence and rarely challenge them. Predators are, however, a serious issue and to a great degree will determine the best fencing for your area. Refer to the predator control article for more detailed information.

Fencing comes in many shapes and sizes. Beautiful white horse fencing is attractive but overkill in terms of cost and actually poor in terms of deterring predator as it has large openings that coyote or loose or feral dogs can get through and that mountain lion and bear can easily climb—not to mention inquisitive humans. If you have this or other types of existing wood fencing, it can be adapted by the installation of electrified "hotwires" at key heights. Barbed wire is dangerous and damages fiber. Multi strand high tensile fencing (electrified or not) is very popular with alpaca breeders. Typical height is 5' with 5–7 strands varied in spacing—closer together at the bottom than the top. We, however, are nervous with it as we've heard of too many horror stories where animals have gotten caught up in it and either hung themselves or broken a leg so we prefer to not recommend it. Field or "no climb" fencing which is what we prefer is rapidly becoming the design of choice as its cost is now similar to high tensile and has small openings nothing can get through and cannot be climbed. Either type can be installed with wood, metal or fiberglass posts depending upon aesthetic appeal and your budget. It is critical that all gate openings are as flush to their mounting posts as possible to again avoid any accidental hangings in between the gate, the post and the securing mechanism. Remember that your fencing is only as good as the person who installs it.

The layout of fencing is as important as the type of fencing. Good layout design maximizes your existing pasture space which is particularly important with small acreage if it is to be intensively grazed. The use of interior fence lines, multiple gates and chutes allows more animals per acre to be grazed and facilitates the easy movement of animals from barn to pasture and pasture to pasture. At our farm, we had no barn or fencing so everything had to be designed and built from the ground up. We spent 6 months researching both and playing with many designs based upon what we had seen at other farms and our own ideas. We came up with the concept of 'raceways' to move animals easily from one area to another—something we had not seen on alpaca farms. We got the idea from cattle and sheep farms where chutes are used for shearing, loading and branding. We simply expanded the idea to a larger scale. Our fence contractor at first thought we were crazy as it meant adding an additional fence line and a few gates.