

FENCING

for Llamas and Alpacas

by Dolores Gardner

When talking about fencing for llamas and alpacas, two things need to be considered. Are you keeping llamas and alpacas in or keeping other animals out? The answers to these two questions will determine the kind of fences you build. Fencing for llamas should be designed with dual goals of keeping them in and keeping other animals out. In most instances, it's easy to keep alpacas inside fencing, so your primary objective for their fencing would be protection from animals on the outside. Adequate and safe fencing for llamas or alpacas will vary from ranch to ranch due to terrain, presence of wild or domestic predatory animals and space available for different herd groups.

You should have an overall plan in mind with the basics in place prior to bringing any llamas or alpacas home and starting your fencing project. Will you have a full breeding program? Females, herd sires and eventual crias? Then, the very natures of llamas and alpacas and how they behave in groups will determine your choice of fences. Other factors to consider are pasture sizes and their proximity to each other. Will you have more than one stud and will you pasture all your intact males together, as some propose, or will you have separate pens or runs for each intact male? If you pasture all the intact males together, you must have plenty of room for each male to have his own territory and be able to escape from another male if male games (chest butting and leg biting) occur. Weanlings need an area away from the mother if possible so that they will not try to go through the fence to get to her. You need two weanling pastures—one for females and one for males.

This is especially important for llamas as males have been known to breed as early as eight months and some females ovulate as early as eight months also. It has been



Acceptable Fencing

my experience that geldings will co-habitate with any group. They are especially valuable in the new mother pen to protect the babies and as an uncle for a lone weanling.

By and large, when llamas are content in their living groups and their herd maintains the status quo, even if it is just two



Barbed Wire

llamas, they will respect a three and one-half foot to four-foot fence. However, they are agile animals and can easily jump this height, especially if they are motivat-

ed. Intact males are very motivated if they share a common fence line with open females. They can also go through and crawl under fences for the same reason. Weanlings will try almost anything to get back to their mothers but are especially fond of going through and crawling under wire fences.

There will be some strain on all fences because of the curious nature of the llama. Heads will go through (and sometimes bodies) to reach the other side, even if the pasture is identical to the one they are in. Breeding males, both alpacas and llamas, if housed next to open females will lean on, rear up, reach over and sometimes even lunge against the fence or gate to protect their territories. Their fences should be sturdy and five to five and one-half feet high.

Most alpacas don't challenge a fence the way other livestock do. As mentioned earlier, fencing for alpacas should be designed to keep predators out. These predators may include bears, mountain lions, wolves or the neighbor's dogs or packs of dogs, depending upon where you live. Many alpaca owners also keep one or more guard dogs to patrol the perimeters of their alpaca pens. This deters many predators before they get close to the pens.

The next consideration will be wild or domestic predators. Roaming dogs have killed many camelids. Although domesticated, a pack of "wild" dogs will kill or maim just for the sake of killing. They bear no resemblance to their cousins, coyotes, which kill for food. They also will not back off when they see the llama coming toward them as wolves and coyotes will. Four-foot high mesh-type (pig,

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chicken, chain link) fence set close to the ground will almost always deter dogs. If you choose, you can run a single strand of electric fence along the ground and across the top of the fence to keep predators from digging under or crawling over. Another option is to stake the fence to the ground at regular intervals. Buried chicken wire will deter digging, but will not do anything to keep them from going over the fence. A disadvantage to buried wire is



Cyclone Fencing

that it will corrode and will be difficult to remove. It also can become entangled in mower blades or other farm equipment.

If you live in an area with bears, seek advice from a neighbor with "bear proof" fencing. Some owners have been successful with strong, high fences and electric wire on the outside.

Building safe, strong fences in the beginning is more economical than replacing fences every few years. Flimsy fences will not last. Board fences, pipe fences and wooden pole fences are attractive, safe and last many years. The only two negatives for these are dogs coming through and babies going out, but if the boards are placed properly, a cria cannot escape. Cedar post and rail fencing is attractive also, but some alpacas and llamas tend to chew on the rails. In some parts of the country, cedar posts will rot in the ground even though they are advertised to the contrary.

There are several types of mesh fencing available; v-mesh, chain link, field fence, etc. Buy the heavier gauge as it is more durable and holds its shape better. Many use multi strand high tensile fencing. All fencing can be augmented with electrified "hot wire" placed at key heights. Hot wires



Custom Made Fencing

also provide protection from predators for alpacas and llamas alike. If high tensile fencing it is not electrified, llamas may go through it, as the wire will give just enough to allow them to "schooch" through. Llamas have been injured in this type of fence by getting caught and pulling until the wire occludes the circulation to a limb and/or cuts a body part.

Several kinds of fencing should be avoided. Alpacas and llamas will stick their faces and necks through almost anything, including barbed wire, often causing physical injury or damage to fiber. In several instances I have known animals which lost an ear, had a facial or neck cut and in one case, an animal died as the result of bleeding from a laceration sustained from a barbed wire fence. So, it's best to avoid barbed wire fencing of any type.



Good Fencing

Any kind of fencing material with six-inch squares or larger should not be used. Again, the head goes through, but sometimes the animal cannot get it out. If this occurs, there's a high likelihood of undue stress and injury to the animal.

When planning your pastures, allow for gates wide enough to accommodate tractors, trucks and other equipment. All gates should be a minimum of 10 feet. Your plan may include poop removal by shovel and wheelbarrow and you believe you do not need wide gates. Plan ahead. Unless you are one hundred percent sure

your herd will stay small, put in the wide gates. Also, plan them so that equipment may move from pasture to pasture with as few turns as possible. Metal gates are durable and safe, but wooden gates can also be used.

Gates are the most expensive part of a fence. If sufficient gates do not fit in the budget, plan your fences for their future addition. By planning ahead, you can set posts at the proper distances to accommodate more gates in the future. This will allow you to simply cut out a section of fencing, tie it off to the existing posts, and hang your gate.

Last word of advice: although llamas and alpacas are easy to care for, you need to always remember their curious natures. They have a tendency to stick their heads through any opening, including dangling ropes, slots in feed racks, gates and fences. Baby alpacas and llamas experiment with tasting and mouthing everything (similar to crawling human babies). It is wise to keep harmful objects such as plastic, bailing twine and other items out of the way. The goal is to keep your alpaca and llama friends safe, so you can enjoy them. Long-term planning and installation of fencing that meets the challenges of your geographic area and day in and day out wear and tear from your alpacas or llamas will go a long way toward helping you achieve this goal.

About the author:

Dolores Gardner has been a member of ALSA since the early nineties. She became an ALSA judge in 1997. She earned the Level III classification in 2001. She and her husband, Donley, attended as exhibitors or judges approximately 17-20 shows per year until his unexpected death in October 2003. She finds it somewhat difficult to enter as many shows as an exhibitor, but still attends six-ten shows per year.



Wooden Fencing