

Beating the Heat - Texas Style

By Sue Ellen Duree

In September 2005, between the Katrina and Rita hurricanes, I stepped off the airplane at the George Bush International Airport in Houston and took my first breath of the famous humid summer heat of southeastern Texas. It wasn't just oven hot. It was thick and heavy, and it was like trying to breathe bricks. I knew I had to relocate to Texas or lose my job, but what was I going to do to help my llamas get through this brutal humid heat? For me, life without llamas just didn't seem worth living, so I immediately began my search for ways to make summer life more bearable for my four-footed, woolly friends. I hope what I have discovered can help you beat the heat, no matter where you live.

Shade You need quality shade from big leafy trees or a shade structure. A stuffy, dark, hot hole in a barn provides shade, but without ventilation will not provide the needed relief from the heat. Try to provide shade that is in a ventilated area, and takes advantage of any natural breezes.

Ventilation Electric fans are your next line of defense. Keep the air circulating. If you have several llamas you might need several fans, as the most dominant llama may become a fan hog and deprive others of the relief provided by the air movement. Keep in mind, llamas are curious and often mischievous, and they will "play" with the fans and electrical cords if they can reach them. So, arrange fans and electrical cords so they can not be reached. Electric fans can be put on timers that can be programmed to turn on and off. This helps with the electric bill if you only need the fans in the middle of the day and you can't be home to operate

them. You can also put your fans on motion sensors so they come on only when "someone" is there to appreciate the breeze. August through September, I often need to run my fans around the clock.



Cool drinking water How often do you check the temperature of your llama's drinking water? Last summer the water in my big swimming pool regularly topped 98 degrees. Imagine how hot a small body of water like a water trough could become on a hot day! To keep the drinking water as cool as possible while I was away at work, I started freezing milk jugs (emptied and well rinsed, of course) filled with water, and placing them in the water trough. To keep the water cool, rotate fresh ice jugs into the trough and place the spent jugs back in the freezer for "recharging." Don't fill the plastic milk jugs completely full, as water expands as it freezes and you might split your containers. You can also use emptied, very well rinsed, bleach bottles to make your custom ice cubes. I use small plastic washtubs as summer water troughs because the smaller volume of water is easier to keep fresh and cool than a big water trough. You can also get additives to put into the drinking water that replaces electrolytes. Check this out at your local farm supply store or with your vet.

Wet sand Llamas vent a lot of heat from their bellies and under-arm areas, and they find it refreshing to lie down on wet sand. If you just wet the dirt, your llamas will get covered with mud. In addition to it being messy, when the mud dries, it could cake up on the fleece and actually trap in body heat. I found that sand is worth the investment. You can get masonry sand by the dump truck load, by the bag from home improvement stores, or by a pick-up load from your local sand and gravel plant. Wet the sand by hand held lawn hose, sprinkler, or soaker hose. Your water source for sand wetting can be put on a timer so water will be applied while you are away at the office. Cool the wet sand with electric fans. The combination of shade, wet sand, and fans makes a great llama cooling station.



Pond or pool Have a pond? Lucky you! Llamas often will wade into the water, and even lie down in a pond for heat relief. (Mamma Llama didn't raise no fool!) I have heard that llamas can spend so much time in the pond water that their fleece "rots off" below the water line. I have had no experience with Waterline Rot with my llamas, perhaps because they all prefer the wet sand at the fans, but it's a potential problem that you need to be aware of. Llamas don't have this fleece damage problem when they lie on wet sand.

You don't have a pond? Don't despair. Llama size, plastic children's wading pools work great. A pool of water alone won't necessarily do the trick. Water can get hot in the little pool. Water frozen in empty plastic milk jugs can keep the wading pool cool as well as the drinking water. The idea is to give them something cool to enjoy, not a hot tub. The hot tub and margaritas are for you! Also, change the water frequently to keep it clean as well as refreshing.



Water Misters When the humidity is 95% plus, you might think that water misters would not be much help. How much water can you put in the air, anyway? But, they can help when there is air movement. The misters should be positioned to take advantage of any natural breezes. If there is no natural air movement, or not enough, plug in those fans! I used to find in-line water misters at home improvement stores, but last year I had to use my computer and go on-line to find them. There are several kinds of misters to choose from, so take a look and see what meets your needs. Last year I bought Arizona Misters made by Orbit. This consists of a long thin hose that you screw into your lawn hose, and it has several mister nozzles on it. They come with mounting hardware so you can install them on a barn overhang or other structure. I have even tied some up

into shade trees. Install the misters high enough so your llamas can't reach them. If you have high alkaline water that plugs the spray orifice, try soaking the spray knob in vinegar occasionally to dissolve the deposits that block the little spray holes.



More "Water Works".

On a hot day, many llamas find relief by standing in the spray of sprinklers.

Also, grab a hose on a hot day and water down your llama's legs and belly. Just the legs and belly. All-over wet downs are uncomfortable and aren't appreciated. My llamas line up and fight for position to have their legs sprayed with cool water. Go ahead and hose yourself down while you are at it! It feels great!

Shear Whether you use fancy electric shears, standard hand shears, or you borrow Mom's favorite dress making scissors, shear, shear, shear! A barrel cut is a minimum, but when it's really hot, a full body shearing may be needed. You may need to shear several times during the summer. If you are a spinner, like me, and want the fleece to grow as long as possible between shearings, you can do a repeat shearing on the belly area and any other location where the fleece isn't used for spinning. This would provide some heat relief, and you'd still have a prime fleece for spinning. Remember to slather some sunscreen on your llama after shearing or the freshly ex-

posed skin could become sunburned, especially on the back and rump.

If you can't bear to remove your llama's beautiful neck fleece, try shearing a 4 inch wide strip on the underside of their neck, from where it joins at the jaw, all the way down to where it joins at the chest. Neck Venting allows body heat to escape from the neck (like unbuttoning the top button on your shirt), and the fleece around the clipped area generally fluffs around the opening so it's not very noticeable.



If it's really, REALLY, REALLY hot, or hot for a loooooong time, don't let your vanity regarding your llama's fleece override common sense regarding your llama's health and safety. You will never forgive yourself if you loose your llama to heat because you thought the fleece was too pretty to cut off. If you can't afford an air-conditioned barn, or you can't ship your llama off to a cooler region for the hot season, be prepared to shear it ALL, if needed.

Cumulative Heat In south-east Texas, I've heard it said that May is like June, June is bad, July is nasty, August is brutal, but September is deadly. Heat stress is usually cumulative, and doesn't just happen overnight. The same conditions that your llama sailed through in early or mid summer could cause him to heat



stress later in the summer. Be vigilant, and add extra heat relief components as the summer wears on. Know where your llamas are, and their usual habits. If something seems amiss, it often is. If Fluffy isn't standing in her usual place by the fan under the big elm tree, go look for her. She may need you. Watch the weather reports, and be prepared for days that are expected to be especially hot.

Diet and Weight An overweight llama will suffer more in the heat, just like an overweight person. Keep the weight down by proper diet and exercise during the cooler time of year. You can start a reduced diet now, but since it's already so hot, this is not the time to put "chubby" up on the treadmill for a trot. Make a commitment regarding diet and exercise as soon as it cools off.

Eating green pasture may make your llama "hotter" than if he was on dried hay. It's the way the "digestion thing" works, to over simplify it. You might consider feeding hay rather than green pasture during periods of especially brutal heat. Also, if you

feed supplements, feed them in the cool of the morning so they can be digested before it gets hot.

Vet Plan Get with your vet before an emergency hits and discuss your plan of action for heat stress, should it happen. Your vet may also have more ideas to help you prevent an emergency. Make sure your vet has directions to your place on file in their office, and include a map, especially if finding you could be tricky. You don't want to be on the phone giving directions to your vet during a heat stress emergency when you are needed in the pasture (or any other emergency, for that matter!).

I've presented some cooling ideas, but don't let it stop there. Talk with your friends, and share new ideas to help your llamas get comfortably through the summer. I don't know about you, but I'll try almost anything to keep my Cool Camalids cooler.

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broom corn and makes handmade brooms, raises bees, makes lavender oatmeal soaps, spins fleeces, and breeds and shows her precious llamas. Sue Ellen has been in love with llamas since she was introduced to them in Mount Hood, Oregon, in 1998, where she lived with them until her employer moved her and the llamas to Texas in the fall of 2005.

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