



TILLMAN SURI ALPACA TIPS

1. TLC

TLC is an essential part of a Tillman Suri Alpaca's upbringing. It only adds to their gentle nature and disposition. Remember, you can never give a suri too much of the stuff.

2. VETERINARY CARE

Suris require quarterly worming and annual vaccinations for their protection. Watching their daily routines is your best aid to determining if one is feeling ill or uncomfortable. Insurance is available for full mortality and theft, for named perils, or for special events.

3. BREEDING

Our breeding philosophy is based on 20 years of selective breeding. We never sacrifice suri character for color, and we do not cross breed huacayas and suris. Neither should you. Keep in mind that a suri is probably more rare than a vicuna — which is a threatened species — so breed accordingly. Every breeder can help preserve the genetic purity of this beautiful animal.

Prior To Breeding we follow a two-step protocol for our female suri alpacas:

1. Once they have had a baby, we wait three weeks and then breed them again. According to Dr. Ahmed Tibary at Washington State University veterinary teaching hospital, this is an ideal compromise between the condition of the post partum females uterus and ovaries. We repeat the first breeding 2 1/2 or 3 days later to increase the chances of a fertile mating.
3. After the female has her cria, we wash off her perineum, tail and hocks so she will not attract flies. We use a pressure washer for grooming livestock, and a detergent soap. They really enjoy this bath. After the tail has dried off, we will wrap her tail with a new clean vet wrap so her normal uterine discharge can be expelled freely. This allows us to observe any discharge.
4. Three weeks later we wash her perineum with an iodine soap scrub. Then we wash off the iodine soap with a diluted iodine solution. Both products are available from your veterinarian. We use a 2-inch square gauze for the iodine scrub and several thick pieces of cotton for the rinse. It is important to wipe off the iodine scrub which has a soap solution added to it, so this does not burn the mucosa of the females' vagina. (Don't get these two products mixed up.)

Preparing a female in this way does reduce uterine infections and improves the fertility rate of our breedings. It also encourages you as an owner to be aware of the status of your female's uterus. If she has developed a uterine infection after giving birth, you will be a lot more likely to notice an abnormal discharge if her tail is wrapped, and you personally prepare her for breeding. When you have a large ranch, preventative medicine really pays off. It will help you too, even if you have a small herd. Following this protocol will decrease the time interval between your babies. This is known as a "birthing interval."

4. IMPRINTING

Imprinting is a practice we use at Tillman with all our female newborns. Early human contact with each cria helps them get use to us. This way, we are seen not as threat but rather as a two-legged friend. Imprinting is done with females only. Male suris that are too familiar around people may see them as potential mating partners.

5. DIET

Diet is critical for healthy suris. In their native environments, alpacas prefer grazing in moist "green valleys", while llamas will tend to prefer more coarse vegetation, being more of "cafeteria-style" eaters. A typical diet for our suris consists of grass hay along with grain mineral supplements. Fresh, clean water should always be available as well. Poor diet and unsafe drinking water can often lead to serious health problems. At Tillman, we grow our own grass hay and keep thorough weight records of our pregnant mothers and breeding females. We've also found Dr. L.W. Johnson's article, "Feeding Camelids" a helpful source for additional dietary information. You'll find this article on our website under the ABOUT ALPACAS, in the ARTICLES section.

Linear Feed Bunks are inexpensive feed troughs that can be mounted along the back wall of your barn or three sided loafing sheds. Suri alpacas co-operate very well at a feed trough. They will stand shoulder to shoulder and eat together. You will need about two feet in width for each alpaca, or three feet for a llama. The 2 x 6 inch "lip" along the outside of the feed bunk keeps the alpacas from pulling hay out of the trough. This helps keep your show string cleaner, and prevents the hay from falling onto the ground where it might pick up fecal contamination.

Materials:

- 1" thick exterior grade plywood
- 2 x 6 boards (treated or untreated)
- Wood screws

Directions:

1. Rip 4' x 8' plywood into 2' widths.
2. Mount boards 24 to 26 inches high. (Or as high as the backboard of your metal loafing sheds 2 x 6 braces. You know, the boards you screw the metal siding into between your 4 x 4 posts.
3. Add 45-degree angle braces every 48 inches and attach to bottom back brace. Cut these at a 45-degree angle and they will fit the back of the back brace and bottom of the plywood feed bunk. These are 33 inches long with 45-degree angle cut on my height of feed bunk.
4. Cross brace feed bunk every 48 inches with 2 x 6 and use a 2 x 6 lip so alpacas cant pull grass hay out onto ground. This feature is very important and very effective.

Remember, you will have to make a square cut out on the plywood to wrap around the loafing sheds 4 x 4 post.

6. LAWN LOGIC

Lawn Logic is a herd management program we use at Tillman to keep stats on our entire herd, track their health and keep records on file. With the aid a special computer program, designed by Canadian programmer, Simon VanDerHeigden, we are able to keep an updated, active file on each animal. Cheryl served as a consultant on the project. Her medical background and overall knowledge of the species was instrumental. The computer program, the first of its kind, is still widely used within the industry today.

7. SHELTERING

Sheltering your suri herd protects them from hot sun in summer and the cold winds in winter. Fencing requirements will vary based on location and should be designed to keep your suris in and keep predators out. A simple 4'-5' woven wire fence can accomplish this economically and with minimal effort and expense.

8. KEEPING COOL

Hosing down alpacas is a great way to keep them cool, especially ones that have been left in full fleece in the hot summer months. If you spend any time in the highlands of South America, you will find alpacas congregated around shallow pools of water where a little bit of green grass grows. They get very excited about pools of water and will lie down in it even in the winter. In late February, even though there might be a light cover of snow on the ground, if I start hauling out my irrigation hoses for our wheel lines, they follow me around, hoping for a splash in the water. So in the summer, make friends with your herd by offering them a romp in the water. Remember though, keeping alpacas and llamas cool in the summer requires adequate shade, air circulation, fans, and possibly an insulated or air conditioned barn. Yearly shearing helps, too.

9. HERD SEGREGATION

Segregation of the herd is a common practice we use at Tillman. It ensures each animal lives in a safe, secure environment. Primarily, segregation is based on nutritional needs among these four different groups: Young females, nursing mothers, adult females not nursing and males. Males are usually segregated again by age.

10. CATCH PENS

Catch Pens are used to catch animals without running them around. We have a catch pen in every barn and pasture. Frequently, we will have a pasture lead to a runway that leads to a small pen that leads to a catch pen. The gradual progression from a large field to a smaller one helps create a kind of passive training that teaches the alpacas and llamas to stand when you ask them to. We also use catch pens between a runway and a stud run. This allows us to bring a female to a male, or catch a male without difficulty. These catch pens may be nothing more than three portable steel panels with an additional panel-gate. A variation on the catch pen is a slightly larger area that we use to "tease" females. A 30 foot by 30 foot area is really too big for a catch pen but it is about the smallest pen you can use to tease a female. If it is any smaller, she will feel trapped and may not give you an accurate indication if she has ovulated or not. In these larger pens, we may have three or four portable panels set up in the corner to act as a catch pen.

11. RUNWAYS

Runways make life on the ranch much easier. All of our pastures have access to a runway that leads to our main barn. This allows one person to round up an entire herd of alpacas or llamas. It is important to have the runway wide enough that you can drive a cart or tractor down it, and to have room to plow snow out of the way. But if you make it too wide, the alpacas or llamas can run past you. Sixteen feet is the longest standard gate that will not sag or need a guy wire to support it. This width has worked out very well for us.

12. HALTERING

Haltering is easy when done right. The halter strap latches on the left, so you should always try and approach your llama from the left in order to catch them with their right side up against a fence or side of the barn. It's a good habit to get into, especially when haltering larger animals.

13. ORGANIZING HALTERS

Organize your halters into two groups: work halters and show halters. Inexpensive pegboard mounted on the wall of the barn is an easy and attractive way to display and organize your halters. Once you mount your pegboard, insert the metal hangers into the holes in the pegboard. Now, you will no longer have to sort through all those large work halters while looking for your braided 6 month old show halter. It's also useful for hanging ribbons after you come home from a show. We also organize our lead ropes into ones we use every day and for shows. Plastic coat racks can be used for organizing your show leads and halters when you are at a show. Just zip-tie them to your stall and you will look tidy and professional until your alpacas start mouthing your halters and lead ropes.

14. WEIGHING

Weighing is a great way to monitor a suri's growth rate and overall health. It also determines how much medication to administer when an animal is sick. We weigh all of our suris on a regular basis and keep a detailed record each time their hoofs touch our scales. Just as a rule of thumb: Pregnant mothers should slowly be gaining weight while new mothers should be gradually losing or maintaining their weight shortly after delivery.

15. SHEARING

Shearing is done in the spring at Tillman. Our animals look forward to about as much as a 6-year-old child does the dentist. But we insist it gets done. A suri carrying a heavy fleece typically will have a higher body temperature. Higher body temperatures, especially in hot summer months, can cause severe health problems including birth defects, premature births, low sperm counts among males, dehydration, stunted growth and malnutrition. If you decide to hire someone to shear for you, always ask for references. Shearing can actually work against you in the shows, as the heat and sweat causes a cotted, "cross-fibered," or pelted fleece.

16. SHOWING

Showing builds friendly competition among breeders, trainers and handlers. Suri alpacas are judged primarily for their fleece.

17. TRAVELING

Traveling with llamas or alpacas often requires some quick thinking. I was recently caught in the central valley of California while it was 100 degrees in the shade. I was hauling a \$250,000 black alpaca male, named King Kong. I had leased King Kong from our friends and customer Craig and Daphne Aurness and was returning him to Cindy Harris farm in Moorpark, California. While the world's most expensive black male alpaca had been shorn, was an easy keeper, and I had an insulated trailer and plenty of insulation, I decided to stop at a truck stop, which I knew had air and water hoses for RV's. I proceeded to hose King Kong Down right there in my trailer. He loved it. I also bought several bags of crushed ice, spread it over his bedding and off we went. When we arrived in Moorpark, he had a normal body temperature and was breeding the next day.

18. PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographing your herd provides you with both beautiful images and important documentation. The great portrait photographer, Edward S. Curtis photographed his subjects about 6 inches below eye level. We take this perspective one step further and actually get down at a cria-view perspective of the world. This helps eliminate background clutter in the photograph and often gives you clear sky above or behind the subject. Keep the animal on a halter and lead like you would in a show ring. I prefer to use a vertical grip when shooting, a device that's available on most professional quality 35mm cameras. I shoot almost exclusively in the Portrait (vertical) rather than Landscape (horizontal) format, so having a shutter button on the vertical grip allows me to keep my subject perfectly upright rather than canted to the left or right. A daylight flash will help bring out the luster in a suri alpaca, but you will be limited to about 100mm focal length. A high luster suri can fool even the most expensive light meter. When not using a daylight flash, I zoom in on the blanket of the suri, check my meter reading for F stop and shutter speed, then re-compose the photo and shoot at this exposure. While I do rely on the automatic exposure of my camera, especially when I am using it as a spot meter as I described above, I seldom use the automatic focus. Instead, I manually focus on the animals nose. We like to take at least one quality photograph of each alpaca and llama prior to its first shearing.