

## **Preparing your Fleece for Show**

By Cathy Merkley

To help your Huacaya or Suri alpaca get the best results possible at the show, you need to do a few simple things. Keep your alpacas in clean pastures, free of weeds, sticky hay, seed heads, bushes, twine, polypropylene or any other material that can be caught up in the fleece. Feed them to maximize good health and body condition, including clean drinking water and free-choice mineral. Shear all of your alpacas annually. Select the alpacas that you feel have the best fleeces in your herd. Do not wash, rinse, shampoo, brush or blow the fleeces in any way prior to or after shearing. This disrupts the character of the fleece and will result in lost points.

When shearing, take the largest blanket possible and remove to a sorting table for skirting. Select a lock from the mid-side of the fleece and use it as your sample. Compare this lock to the edges of the fleece and remove anything that does not match it in fineness, length, character or colour. Hand-pick large bits of vegetable matter from the fleece, along with any manure or stained fleece. Uniformity of micron, length, colour, as well as lack of impurities are the categories that benefit by doing this. Breeding for density and long staple get the best weight results. A good weight score cannot be balanced by including the parts of the fleece that should be skirted out against lost points in the other categories.

Fold the two halves together and from this view, remove any coarse fibres or second cuts (short bits) from the cut side that is facing up. From the britch end, slowly roll the fleece, removing any coarse fibre or second cuts from the bottom half as the fleece is rolled. Place the fleece in a clear plastic bag to send to the show.

By performing these simple steps, your alpaca's fleece will be the best it can be in competition.

Good luck.