

## Yarn, from Alpaca fibre to Wool ball, the Rivervale way.

I LOVE alpaca fibre, and I also spin angora, malamute, huski, silk and sheep. Alpaca is what I spin most as we have 9 adorable 'fleece machines' out in the paddocks.

### Shear: (delight)

On shearing day we have 3 bags labelled for each alpaca. I only have solid colours, no multi's yet, (sadly). So there is no need for more than 3 bags each. However, if there is a multi you probably need to label extra saddle bags to split the saddle into colours as you go.

Bags are labelled Saddle, Neck, Leg. The saddle bag is best as a large, clear, plastic bag, then use 2 smaller bags for Neck and Leg. These two bags can then be tied off, put in the larger bag with the saddle and then the whole fleece kept together until you are ready to use it. For the saddle bag we use ventilated bags, (bags with holes in them).

### Tumble:

We tumble the dry fibre for an hour to remove much of the dust. This involves getting an old clothes tumble dryer from the tip. Remove the heater element, remove the door seal, and get a pipe that connects to the rear vent so that the exhaust outlet can be extended away from you. Ours is vented directly outside as Brian cut a hole in the shed wall matching the position of the machine outlet.

Put in your fibre and tumble for an hour. You will see dust fly out the back.

Re-bag the fibre into your bag, but first turn the bag inside out so the dust that remained in the bag is now on the outside of your bag, not against your less dusty fleece.

### Card:

We then card our fleece into nice cloudy batts on a carder our mate made. It is powered by a cheap Makita drill. I love it! I love carding because I can make some great mix'n'match colours, a lot more of the dust flies out, and I can add in other fibres if I am aiming to make a particular fibre. LOL, usually I'm not, I'm just having fun spinning alpaca. And that it is powered leaves a free hand to put in other bits of stuff as I go. Beside the carder I keep a hook to get the fleece off the tines, an old paint brush to generally brush off dust etc., and a pair of tweezers to remove vegetable matter from the batt as I go.

I don't always card, I often spin straight from the tumbled fleece.

### Spin:

Spin away, ply away, skein up.

### Skein:

I tie the skein in 4 places using a figure of 8 sort of tie-up at each of the 4 points. Make your tie-up thread a different colour to your yarn. How fab, already we have gone from fibre to yarn! I do a figure of 8 tie-up because I have a big flyer and hence a big skein and I don't want a tangled mess after washing.

### Wash:

I wash the skein in ordinary shampoo and very hot water. I save all our end squirts in shampoo bottles in an untidy heap in the laundry, and use them to wash alpaca fibre in water as hot as I can take. It usually takes 5 washes/rinses to end up with clear hot water. In the last rinse I sometimes add 'washing soda', it is a fabulous and cheap conditioner/softener. Not that alpaca needs softener!

### Dry:

I whizz the squeezed out skein around a few times in the air, then hang to dry, usually over a pot plant to make use of the falling drops. At this stage I take time to straighten out the

fibres, check them over and remove with tweezers any bits of vegetable matter I may have missed. Actually I'm just drooling over the yarn. I've only been spinning for 2 years and I am still amazed I can do this.

#### Ball up:

I put the dry skein back on my clock skeiner, remove the tie-ups, tweak the yarn into order and pass it through the ball winder. Leave one tie-up on the beginning of the yarn so you can find the centre of the ball. It is easier for the end user to take from the centre. (and it looks really cool as the ball is used up, you have a gorgeous webbed shell to look at, getting thinner and thinner). I take care to count the revolutions of the skeiner so I have an estimate of the length. For me, 50 times around the skeiner is 50 metres. I weigh each ball and produce a label so we know the origin, yarn mix, date, length and weight. This becomes important for me as I like to weave, so knowing the length available is critical.

#### Note:

1. If I am spinning Suri alpaca I don't card. With Suri I often cut the tip off each lock, splay out in my hand and spin. Sometimes I use a dog comb and comb out each lock over a piece of leather on my lap. I keep the tangles from the comb in a separate bin and use it for felting.
2. If you are going to dye your fibre straight away, do it after washing and before drying.
3. If you are going to dye your fibre 'later', stop once the skein is dry from washing. Do not ball it up. Keep it in the skein tie-up mode, in an open plastic bag with a paper label saying what you intend for it.