



FLOWERDALE ESTATE ALPACAS

The full scoop on PacaPoop

It is truly amazing how much manure llamas and alpacas can generate in a short period of time. Their fecal output is actually about one to two percent of their body weight per day--and this is the dry weight! In terms of fresh, wet weight, it is significantly more because of all the water contained in lama dung. Those dung piles seem to have a habit of doubling in size almost overnight! So after the compost bins are full, the flower beds, vegetable garden and fruit trees are amply fertilized and the pasture is getting a case of nitrogen overload, three questions remain to be asked: 1.) How do you get the manure off the fields?; 2.) How do you get the manure out of the barn?; and 3.) How do you get the manure off the farm?

We've managed to resolve these three tricky questions and at the same time save money and effort and become goodwill poop ambassadors of our local community in the bargain. These are clearly rewards worth striving for!

Our pasture set-up is such that we have numerous paddocks radiating out from the barn while allowing the animals full access to the back half of the barn at all times. Their access area is where the llamas and alpacas (females and offspring only) obtain water (from a small, self-feeding water dish mounted 40cm above the floor so that the alpacas can't cause fecal contamination with their footbaths), hay from mangers, and grain from wooden gutters built into the mangers. There are a total of five stalls located on either side of the access area where we separate out the individuals as needed. One of the stalls has a 30cm-wide opening which is ideal for both llama and alpaca youngsters to enter their creep feeder.

We take the opposite tack from most lama farmers who tear their hair out trying to figure ways of preventing their animals from pooping in the barn. We encourage ours to poop in the barn as much as possible--rather than do their toilet in the pasture. Any hay that is leftover in the mangers from the day before that the llamas find unpalatable or unpleasant smelling is strewn on top of that day's manure. (Manure is actually dung plus urine and anything else, such as bedding, which is mixed with it.) Any excess hay left-overs is taken up to a bedding storage area in the hayloft. Whenever the manure is removed from the barn floor (which is rough concrete with a center gutter for hosing down), a thin sprinkling of lime is spread to kill any escaping parasites and the clean, replacement bedding is thrown down from a trapdoor in the hayloft floor to be spread around on top of the lime.

Our local community newspaper has a classified section called Free Recyclables which is a free public service to the community--the newspaper does not charge for any ads placed in this category. (If your local paper doesn't offer such a free service, it shouldn't be too difficult to convince the publisher that such a service would be seen as a wonderful public-relations gesture to their readership.) Anyway, when I first wanted to find people who desire manure for their property, I put in an ad that said;

Free alpaca manure for the scoopin?

SaltSpring Island Llamas & Alpacas, Richard and Maggie Krieger, 537-9446.

We received about 20 phone calls which I logged into our Telephone Message Book which I refer to about every ten to fourteen days whenever I want the barn and/or fields cleaned out. I am always able to find someone from this list on short notice without the need of repeating the ad.



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I explain to these callers that they can have the manure free--the only stipulation I make is that they follow gate etiquette and that they are thorough when they clean a particular area before moving on to a new area. I supply them with the garden cart, rake and a wide-blade shovel. Our barn is also designed to make it easy for a pickup to back up next to the lama access area for easy manure loading.

I also tell them of the particular benefits of lama poop. Lama manure is lower in organic matter content than manures of most other barnyard livestock (like cows, horses and sheep)--but it still has plenty to improve soil texture and water-holding capacity. This lower organic content allows llama and alpaca manure to be spread directly onto plants without fear of 'burning' them. It is the decomposition of organic matter which produces the heat that can damage plant roots. (Low organic matter content of the manure also indicates efficient digestion--another plus when you're talking to people about the benefits of lama ownership!)

Compared to the other barnyard animals, the nitrogen and potassium content of lama doodoo is comparatively high--an indication of good fertilizer value. (Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are the major plant nutrients; they are the familiar N-P-K on fertilizer bags.) Phosphorus is relatively low--but it is low in most other livestock manure as well. Calcium and magnesium content is about average. And salt content is not too high but it is high enough that one should not apply lama poop directly onto seedlings or improperly mixed into the soil. Interestingly enough, feed composition, with few exceptions, doesn't have much effect on manure composition.

Overall, lama ickykaka-poopoo is a great organic fertilizer. Of course, organic fertilizers are usually lower in nutrient content than synthetic fertilizers--so you must apply more to get the same amount of nutrients. For example, lama manure would be about 1.5-0.2-1.1 versus the 20-10-5 of synthetic fertilizer. One would have to apply about 13 times as much lama poop to get the same amount of nitrogen.

I find it unnecessary to compost the lama doodoo as the odor doesn't bother me and although it helps to kill weeds, I find I have to weed anyway so the work benefits of composting are marginal or non-existent. Besides, composting robs some of the nitrogen value from the manure.

After people have had the experience of using lama dung, there is no problem to get them to come back for more. We find that this method has worked really well for us: we are able to get rid of the manure at no cost while exposing people to the captivating personality and characteristics of our animals. It is a win-win situation that gives us positive exposure in our community.



Richard Krieger – Llama & alpaca breeder & author

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