



Information for customers

including Terms & Conditions for fleece processing

Making a booking

Firstly, please contact us by phone or email to discuss your fleece and make a booking.

(We're usually booked up for over a year in advance, so please plan well ahead!)

We'll agree a provisional processing date with you and send you a booking form to complete to confirm your booking.

We ask a deposit of £10.00 per kg for new customers to book a processing slot for 10 kg or more, and for all customers making a booking for 20 kg or more. We'll invoice you for the deposit (if applicable) on receipt of your booking form. This will be deducted from your invoice for fleece processing when your order is complete, but is non-refundable in the event of cancellation.

(There's an exception for customers who either have several slots booked for the year ahead, or who book several years in advance, in which case we'll only ask for a deposit for your next booking, not the ones further ahead.)

Please also note that we have a minimum charge of £100 + VAT per individual batch, which equates to around 1.5 kg incoming weight for alpaca fleece to be spun into yarn, or 3 kg for fleece to be made into rovings. Sheep fleece tends to lose a lot more weight in washing, so we'd need at least 2 kg for yarn and 4 kg for rovings. (We can, of course, process smaller quantities if you wish, but the minimum charge will apply to the batch, so for smaller fleeces, you might want to just hold onto them to process along with the next year's fleece – they'll be fine for a year (or even two) providing they're completely dry, stored at a reasonably even temperature and kept safe from moths or mice.)

Processing dates

Although we work very hard to try to keep to the target dates for processing that we've agreed with you, please note that this isn't always possible (for example, if an important piece of machinery is unexpectedly out of action and we need to arrange repair). If there's a specific date that you need your yarn by, please let us know when you make your booking and we will do our very best to meet this date. Please also advise of any changes to your booking (especially if you decide to send us a lot more or less fibre than originally expected) as soon as possible.

Preparing your fleece

Before processing, your fleece needs to be **sorted** – separating the long, soft 'blanket' and neck fleece from the shorter, coarser fibre from the belly and legs; and **skirted** – carefully picking through the fleece to remove any remaining coarser fibre and as much vegetable matter or other contamination as possible. We can only make beautiful yarn from good quality alpaca fibre – not from bags of thirds, or from hay, seeds, twigs, toenails, or alpaca poo! Our processes can remove a certain amount of guard hair and vegetable matter but we can't work miracles; so if your fleece is very contaminated, so will your yarn be. (Or to put it more positively, the better skirted your fleece, the better quality your yarn will be and the higher the return rate.)

For tips on how to do this, please see the **Preparing your Fleece** section on our website or download our **Five simple steps to prepare a fleece for processing**.

If you've asked us to sort your fleece, or if you send us unsorted fleeces that include fibre unsuitable for processing, we will remove coarse or short fibre at a cost of £16.00 + VAT per kg of rejected fibre. However, this service does not include removing vegetable matter.

Fleeces with a lot of vegetable matter, will need to be skirted by hand to remove the worst of the contamination at a cost of £48.00 per hour. But this won't remove every last bit, so there will almost certainly be some vegetable matter in the finished yarn. And we may be unable to process a fleece which is excessively dirty or contaminated with vegetable matter, in which case we will return it to you at your cost or dispose of it if you wish. Unfortunately, this can often apply to cria fleeces, unless you are able to spend the time skirting it yourself.

Sending us your fleece

Please send your fleece to us a couple of weeks before your processing date – we'll send you a reminder if necessary. Put the fleece into a plastic bag inside a box or strong bag (stuff it in as much as you can – it won't come to any harm for a short time) and send it via post, Parcelforce or another courier to:

The Border Mill
Unit 3, Cheeklaw Business Park
Industrial Estate
Station Road
Duns
TD11 3HS

Please include an order form for each batch of fleece to be processed separately (but there's no need to include all the contact details on each one if you've got several batches).

Processing your fleece

We take great care with every fleece we process and do our very best to maximise the return rate without reducing the quality of your yarn. Return rates for alpaca fleece will vary from less than 50% (rarely, but it can happen) for very coarse fleeces (which we appreciate may be from much-loved older beasties) to over 80%. Our pricing system is designed to take into account the weight lost in tumbling, washing and fibre separating. The average return rates are about 75% for alpaca and 60% for wool (although this does vary a lot by breed) and most of the weight lost is dirt, grease, debris, vegetable matter, short cuts and guard hair (i.e. not the sort of things you want in your yarn) – very little of the weight lost is 'good' fleece.

We're very proud of the yarn we make, and agonise over anything that doesn't come out as well as we would like. But you need to be aware that the downside of having equipment small enough to process an individual fleece is that we don't make 'perfect' yarn – there may be some variation in thickness or colour, the occasional slub or knot, and some bits of vegetable matter (moss in particular is really difficult to remove, as it clings to the fibre). We do, however, make beautifully soft yarns with great character and impeccable provenance.

The average yarn weights that we specify are indicative only – every fleece is different and there will be variation in the yarn weight between batches (for instance, darker colours often spin out heavier than white fleeces). We're getting pretty good at judging the right weight for different yarns and aim to be within 20% of the average, but we can't guarantee to achieve a specific weight.

We occasionally find that a fleece is 'tender', meaning that there are weak points along the length of the fibres causing them to break easily. We try to identify these fleeces before we start processing, but it isn't always possible to identify them in advance. Sometimes these fleeces can still be spun, but there will be small slubs or 'pills' in the yarn. Others can't be spun at all: if this happens, we will only charge you for processing up to the stage at which the problem became apparent. (Alternatively, tender fleeces can sometimes be spun successfully if we add a small percentage of wool – please see below.)

Blending alpaca fibre with wool

Very fine, delicate fleece or very short, straight, or coarse alpaca fleece may need to have 20-30% (or occasionally up to 50%) of fine wool tops (washed, carded and combed fibre) added to help the alpaca fleece through the carder and ensure that the sliver is strong enough for drafting and spinning. This adds to the size of the batch and therefore to the cost of processing your fleece, but you will of course get a larger quantity of yarn at the end (and that yarn will be much softer and smoother than would be possible with pure alpaca) so the cost per kg finished yarn will actually be lower.

We will always try to process your alpaca fibre on its own if that's what you prefer, but in some cases we just aren't able to work with it without adding wool, and this won't always be apparent until we get to the carding stage. We therefore ask for your permission in advance to add wool if necessary to spin your fibre (but of course if you don't want us to do this, we can instead return your alpaca fibre in its part-processed state and charge only for the processes we were able to complete).

Invoicing and payment

On completion of your order, we'll email your invoice for fleece processing, including delivery and VAT, minus any deposit paid. The prices charged will be as advertised on our website at the time that we start work on your fleece, plus VAT at the rate applying at the time of invoicing. Your yarn or other products will be dispatched following payment of this invoice, which is due within 15 days. We reserve the right to apply interest charges of 5% per calendar month to any invoices outstanding after 30 days.

We prefer to receive payment by bank transfer if at all possible. You can also pay by cheque, but we aren't able to accept card payments for fleece processing.