

## Five Really Simple Steps

to prepare a fleece for processing

- 1 Lay out the blanket out on a large table** – preferably made of mesh so that any dirt, dust, and short cuts fall through. If you can put the two halves of the fleece together it will help you get a sense of the 'geography' of the fleece (where the neck, tail etc. would be), but it isn't always easy to do this.
- 2 Remove as much vegetable matter as possible** – pay particular attention to the 'crows nest' in the centre of the blanket between the shoulders, which often has a lot of contamination. If this or any other parts of the fleece are very matted with vegetable matter, just take these parts out – it's worth sacrificing a small amount of fleece to avoid contaminating the rest of the batch. You don't have to spend hours doing this, but make sure that the fleece is reasonably tidy and you've taken out any larger twigs, leaves, seeds, burs, bits of hay, toenails, and those pesky little 'alpaca beans'.

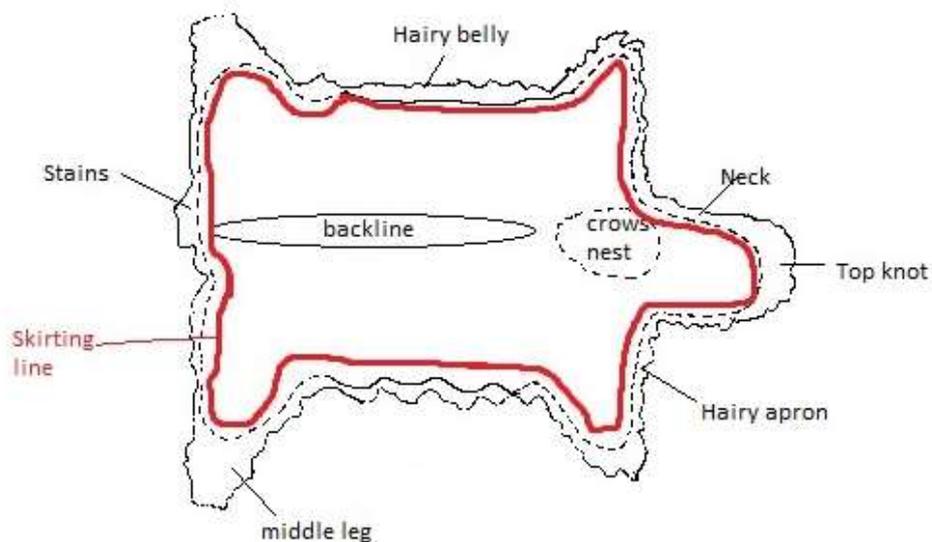
- 3 Now look at the edges of the fleece**

– you're looking for the 'skirting line' around the blanket where the nice long, soft, crimpy fleece starts to get shorter and coarser, or where there starts to be a lot of straight, stiff guard hairs.

For some fleeces, this is really easy to see – browns and fawns in particular can often be 'colour coded' for you, as the point where the colour starts to fade is usually where the fleece quality reduces.

First (cria) and second fleeces may have little or no guard hair, so concentrate instead on where the fleece gets shorter, or less fine and crimpy.

The main thing is to trust your sense of what feels nice and what doesn't. If it feels soft, leave it in; if it doesn't, chuck it out: it really is that simple!



- 4 Turn the fleece over to look at the 'cut' side** – you may find some more stray bits of guard hair, but the main thing you're looking for here are any 'short cuts' – little clumps of short fibres from the shearing process, which will cause slubs in your yarn, but are easy to pick out. Remember that, unlike a fleece for show, you don't have to keep the blanket in one piece, so you can take a bit at a time and put it into the bag, which saves the danger of going round in circles and keeping coming back to the same piece.
- 5 Have a look at the seconds bag** – the fleece from the neck and upper legs is often very fine, but just a little shorter than the blanket. For our semi-worsted process, this will be fine to include with the blanket providing it's a minimum of 5cm. (But other processors or purchasers may have different requirements, so do check with them first.)

*And that's it!*