

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

This is the inaugural column of an on-going series of short columns for the GALA Newsletter. These columns will be based on my observations of our llamas and of the humans who interact with them. The topics, as you will see in this column, are free-ranging ... no holds barred. We have a relatively small herd, eighteen llamas, on a farm in southwestern Maine and our marketing thrust is oriented towards first-time owners. We believe that the sale does not end with the delivery ... and now you know my perspective and my biases ... I also believe in full disclosure. If you wish to get a more comprehensive picture of the environment in which I am writing this column you are invited to visit our website, <http://www.greenbriarllamas.com>.

Your observations and opinions are important to me. My e-mail address is lynd@greenbriarllamas.com.

Toenails ...

I am not an expert on trimming toenails. I still have a lot to learn. My observations here are for those new owners who are faced with that awesome task of trimming those nails the first time.

First, if you don't have a good source of information on how to trim nails, visit Llamapaedia at <http://www.llamapaedia.com>. You will find detailed information on the trimming of nails as well as on other important topics concerning llamas.

Second, let your llama know what you are doing. A surprise attack will not lead to success.

Third, *he/she who hesitates is lost!* When you grasp that foot, you must do so with firm resolve. The llama needs to know that you mean business. A wimpy approach is as bad as a surprise attack.

Our chute is not well designed for trimming nails¹ and we prefer to use as few restraints as possible. Ideally all our llamas would be trained to accept the trimming as just one more interaction with us ... but that is not the case. We do modify our approach to the individual llama. We have one that prefers to be unaltered and

standing in the middle of her shelter when we trim her nails. For the majority of our llamas we use a pen made with four 'green panels'. We halter the llama; my wife, Jeanne, will hold the lead loosely, and will hold a bowl of grain to distract the llama; and I will do the trimming. For those llamas that do not react well in this setting, we find that trimming their nails in our trailer works like a charm. The space is smaller than the pen but still large enough for you and the llama to work comfortably together. Most importantly, the enclosed space seems to calm the llama. If you try the trailer approach you should have rubber mats on the floor of the trailer and your trailer should be positioned to give you a good source of light.

In all of the above approaches I position my body so that I am looking towards the rear of the llama and the leg that is being worked on is positioned between my legs.

If all else fails, you do not have a chute, and you need to work with your llama more before you can trim the nails, try placing the llama on a concrete surface. Do not lift the foot. Tap the toenail to be trimmed with the trimmers to let the llama know you are working down in that area and then carefully start trimming the nail. This approach should be viewed only as a temporary measure.

Stabil icers

If you have to deal with ice on the ground at any time during the winter a pair of Stabil icers should be part of your farm gear. The editors of this esteemed newsletter have extolled the value of Stabil icers in an earlier issue. They permit you to walk safely on treacherous ice and they are a cinch to put on (pun intended). We obtained ours from L. L. Bean, <http://www.llbean.com>. It may be too late in the season to find a pair now, but, by all means acquire your pair before next winter's ice. Your llamas will appreciate your having two arms, two legs and one head with which to see to their needs.

¹ We now have a chute that is adequate to the task of trimming toenails, see *Oh Chute!*, Observation 22.