

Alpaca Feeding Is In The Gutter

By Renee & Barry Prokop
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We are not going to say that alpaca feeding is in the gutter but rather that rain gutters



should be considered as a part of alpaca feeding. One dilemma that we have encountered is how to separate the alpacas during supplement pellet feeding. Alpacas look on the supplements as a

welcome treat and will come a-running if they are in the offing. If buckets are used to hold the supplements, the dominant alpaca tries to hoard the supplements and spits off the other alpacas. If the supplements are placed on the ground, the alpacas try to eat them too fast and end up choking. In addition, there is a chance for slugs/other little beasties to congregate or for the pellets to absorb the ground moisture, thus rendering them useless. An effective as well as low cost solution can be found in rain gutters. Here is what you will need:

Supplies:

- 1 12 foot section of standard plastic house rain gutter
- 1 house rain gutter end cap
- 12 rain gutter supports
- 15 1 inch screws
- 6 rounded and smooth rocks the size of a lime

Tools:

- 1 screwdriver
- 1 drill

After purchasing the supplies, select an area that can be used to support the gutter. We mounted one about waist high on our board fence in the pasture and another one under cover in the run-in. The reason that we decided on two areas was that our supplements turned to goo very quickly when exposed to rain and moisture in the pasture feeder. So if the supplements were being given in the rain, the alpacas usually ended up with a bunch of goo covered rocks. The alpacas didn't seem to enjoy the goo and we didn't enjoy cleaning out the gutters the next day.



We decided on using a 12 foot section of gutter because that seems to be the standard length that gutters are sold and also allowed the alpacas their own space at the feeder. The good news was that we didn't have to cut the gutters to length however if they need to be cut then a regular saw can be used. The first step in the installation process was to drill holes in the bottom of the gutter. The holes should be no bigger than the supplements that you give. This will allow moisture and other debris a place to escape while holding the supplements on the gutter.

We then attached the end cap to one end of the gutter. The end cap should fit snugly on the end of the gutter. We decided not to glue the end cap since we wanted to ensure that no glue ended up in the alpacas. The end cap provides a little better stability and support for the gutter as well as prevents the alpacas from sliding the supplements off the end of the gutter. The other end of the gutter will remain open to allow for easier cleaning and runoff of water. Next, we placed the gutter against the fence. As you can see in the below picture, the gutter is placed at a slight downward angle against the fence with the end cap on the upward side. The gutters shown in the pictures are a little high for normal use so when you install your gutters, place them about a foot off of the ground or as low as possible without touching the ground. The gutter is then screwed into the fence using the 1 inch screws. Make sure that one screw is screwed through both the gutter and end cap so that the end cap is secured in place and will not fall off. Use one screw on each end and one in the middle of the gutter to hold the gutter in place.



Next, take the gutter spacers and place them about every foot on the inside back top edge of the gutter. Screw them through the gutter and into the fence. The spacers are designed to help support and provide stability to the gutter. The added benefit is that the spacers will slow down the greedy and hungry alpaca from inhaling all of the supplements (and possibly choking) before other alpacas can get to them. Lastly, as an additional barrier to slow the alpacas down, place one rock in between each spacer. The rocks will force the alpacas to move them to find additional supplements and allow the alpacas additional time to chew.



In feeding the supplements to the alpacas we generally evenly distribute the supplements along the gutter leaving about a foot empty at the lower end. This will minimize the amount of supplements that end up on the ground.

The total cost of the project was around \$20.00 and it took Renee about 30 minutes to put the first one up. I was able to put the second one up in about 45 minutes. It wasn't as easy for me to find 6 round and smooth rocks. Renee took all the good ones!

About the Authors:

Renee and Barry Prokop have created and developed Black Meadow Suris to provide a diverse collection of suri alpacas. We have a passion for quality customer service and friendliness. Come experience the power that a small dedicated farm can bring to your breeding program! Services that we provide include long and short term agisting, breeding services, and alpaca sales. We also are opening two stores; one online and the other at the farm. Renee and Barry operate Black Meadow Suris just outside of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Fredericksburg is located in the rolling hills just below the falls of the Rappahannock River and halfway between the two Civil War capitals, Washington, D.C. and Richmond, VA.



Renee, who is no stranger to the farm, will manage the day-to-day operations of Black Meadow Suris. Both Barry and Renee will continue to explore, learn, and communicate better ways that they have found to manage their growing farm.

To find out more about Black Meadow Suris, call us at 703-764-9077; email us at Renee@prokops.com or visit us on the web at www.blackmeadowsuris.com