

My Kingdom For Some Water

By Renee & Barry Prokop
Black Meadow Suris

“Water, water, and not a drop to drink.” That was my thought as I stood on the barren frozen snowy tundra as the wind howled across the land. Well, ok, maybe the wind wasn’t howling and I was actually standing in my back pasture. But it was pretty darn cold. I had just been trying to chip the ice out of my frozen automatic watering stations after dumping out the blocks of ice from my rubberized buckets (my plastic buckets had cracked and split many days ago).

I knew that the watering stations would eventually freeze in the winter and that we would have to find alternative ways to provide water to the alpacas. I had started out using plastics buckets (because they were cheap). The trick was to get the buckets filled with warm water and out to the barn before I either fell, tripped, or lost most of the water due to faulty handling. The plastic buckets soon cracked and split as the water turned to a block of ice, I then went for a more industrial strength rubberized model that won’t crack and split no matter how solid the ice became. Somehow that didn’t make me feel any better. In order to devise a better solution, I collaborated with a buddy of mine to develop a solar heating system that would heat and circulate the water during the day. We then added a battery to the pumping system to work during the night. Once we stood back and looked at our design it just seemed too complicated. Finally, admitting defeat, I called my sister-in-law Mary and presented the problem to her. My sister-in-law Mary has owned a horse farm for as long as I can remember. She continues to delight in hearing stories about my supposed farming techniques. Behind my back she refers to me as a “gentleman farmer”. However, in spite of my many trails, I am learning to be a good steward of the land and of alpaca. On this day, I was feeling a bit dejected.

“Say, Mary. Do you have any good ideas to keep the water from freezing during cold days?”

“Sure, heat the water up!”

“Well, I know that you use a heated horse trough but that costs a lot of money to heat all that water all winter. Besides alpaca don’t drink near the amount of water that a horse does. Isn’t there anything out there that I can use for about five gallons of water?”

“Fish.” *Mary delights in confounding me from time to time.*

“Fish? I should put fish in the buckets?”

“No! All you have to do is buy a 25 watt submersible aquarium heater used for fish tanks”



“Well, why didn’t I think of that!”

“Because you’re a gentleman farmer!”

Mary has an answer for everything.

So off I go to the local pet store where I located the submersible aquarium heater in the fish section of the store. They seemed to have an ample supply depending on the amount of water that you want to heat. The heater sizes ranged from five gallons (25 watts) to over forty gallons (150 watts). I selected the 25-watt variety, which will heat a five-gallon fish tank and for less than \$20.00 had the solution in

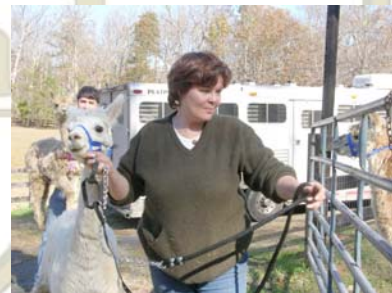


hand. I went back to the farm and filled up my five gallon rubberized bucket with water, plugged in the heater and dropped it into the bucket. The heater was preset for 74 degrees. It had a dial that could be used to increase or decrease the desired water temperature. From that day forward, all I take is a one-gallon watering can and use it to fill the bucket as needed. Every third or fourth day, I completely empty the bucket and refill it with fresh water. It is amazing that such a little contraption can solve such a big problem.

So no more trudging across the barren frozen snowy tundra in howling winds with a bucket of warm water sloshing all over the ground and me. It is the watering can in one hand and a cup of hot coco in the other for me.

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

