



HighTales Alpaca Farm

Family adds alpacas to their country home.

By Brenda Urquhart

We designed and built our country home early in our married life. The trees and hillside granted us a lifestyle we loved. The fruit trees matured and our raised garden beds multiplied over the years.

We've always had Doberman Pinschers and house cats, but then fate directed us to the alpaca. Our interest grew as we studied and learned more about them. When we finally saw these gentle beauties, it was (as they say) love at first sight. We couldn't get enough of them.

My husband, Mike, close to retirement, decided to make the jump. He and our son, Evan, soon had paddocks ready for our herd of 12. The pleasure of seeing them run and interact with each other is a great thrill.

The alpacas love to stand nose to nose with the Dobes and as the alpacas can look into our kitchen window, they are fascinated by the cats looking back at them. When it came time to name our farm, "HighTales" just seemed to fit. We certainly have plenty of tales to share!

Neither my husband nor I grew up on a farm, so each day is full of wonders and challenges. We learned to give the alpacas their monthly injections to protect them from parasites and other health issues, clip nails, trim teeth and shear their wonderfully soft fleece.

When we found ourselves with bags of fleece, I took some spinning lessons and found a new passion. The thrill of taking the fleece from our own herd, preparing the fiber for spinning and then knitting the yarn into socks and mitts, well, it's satisfaction plus!

In the middle of our first winter with these sweeties, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Coming home after surgery as well as after each chemotherapy and radiation treatment, the "girls" would greet me (their paddock is close to the back door), not caring if I had hair or looked a bit pale. Their beautiful eyes always made me feel better.

After one particularly difficult chemo session, we came home to a beautiful cria. She was rich brown just like her mama. "Kira" was the best medicine that I could possibly have had. Oh my, she keeps the herd on their toes.

Our neighbors had spotted a black bear walking on the road not far from us. We became concerned about the alpacas' safety. Llamas are excellent guard animals, so we brought Lacy, a lovely female llama, home. She was just a little over a year old when we introduced her to her new "family." We believed she would bond with them and feel protective in time. Lacy loves to run with little Kira—largest with the smallest—what a sight!

Our herd consists of 16 alpacas and one llama. In preparation for the shearing season, we took a shearing and sorting seminar in April. We found this to be a great help. Our hobby farm is now involved with the farmers' market in Sussex. We take our alpaca yarns, felts and knitted goods as well as our handmade, all-natural soaps to the market on Fridays. Our days are busy and never dull.

We have met so many wonderful people who are generous with their time and share their experiences with us, which is truly a gift. These wonderful, graceful, engaging animals have become dear to our hearts. I can't imagine any other life.