A Word about Alpaca Fencing
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The most common alpaca fencing in Michigan (that I've seen) is 5-foot, no-climb, woven wire fencing. You'll have a hard time going into TSC and finding the words: "no climb" written anywhere though the clerks will probably call it horse fencing. It's vertically and horizontally woven (not a diagonal diamond pattern like cyclone or yard fencing) which forms an approximate 2" wide by 4" high grid. Do not use fencing that an alpaca can stick its head through. Bad things happen.

Woven is stronger than welded – and more expensive.

5-foot vs. 4-foot: I've read that 4-foot will do just fine…as long as your fence posts stick up an extra foot and you run a string of barbLESS wire about a foot above the fence… which actually might be cheaper than using 5-foot high fence – as 4' is more commonly available.

I have read and heard it said that 4' is all you need…yeah, and everybody has 5' regardless of what they say… so I have 5' woven wire just like everybody else.

The males will challenge the fence if females are on the other side – so you'll want 5' fence between males and females if they are directly across from each other.

Posts:
I use 9-foot long, 6" diameter treated pine posts for the corners/gate hinge posts/ends and 8-foot long, 5" diameter treated pine for all others. You can use green "T" posts for line posts and wood for only the corners and brace posts, but in the end it takes time to clamp the fence to the "T" posts whereas it take less time to hammer a few fence staples to a wood post – though it's true that you don't have to dig a hole for a "T" post. By the way, if you use "T" posts it's definitely worth it to use a two-handed post driving tool!

The larger corner posts are down approx 42" and all others are down 36". I haven't had a problem yet.

Distance Between Posts:
Between line posts: approximately 8 to 10 feet.
Between corners and brace posts: approximately 6 feet.

Digging Post Holes:
If you have soft ground you're lucky. If you have clay, underground boulders and hard-packed stuff then you're looking at my situation. I don't have a tractor – yet, so I rented a Bobcat (with a 12" auger attachment) on one occasion and a Dingo on another occasion. Initially I'd rented a lesser auger… for my soil nothing less than a Dingo works. The Bobcat works, but it takes finesse to keep that auger straight up-and-down while drilling – and it likes to walk around on you while you're drilling – which poses a problem if

you're working with a gate (where you NEED the hole to actually be exactly right where you started). The Dingo works very well and doesn't walk around nearly as bad as a Bobcat does. The hole goes right where you put it. A Dingo isn't as cool as a Bobcat and it's only good for that one purpose while you have it rented, but it does the job.

Setting Posts:
Pack dirt around the post bottom with a shovel handle or something like that – while you're holding a level to the post. You don't have to be exact, but you want to be close. You want to pack the dirt in as well as possible and a handle sized dowel is about the right size. A 2x4 is too big. Pack the posts well BEFORE bracing corners – if possible – and definitely before stretching fence! It's best to wait a week or so after setting -- so that rain will wash the dirt down along the posts and you can re-pack before bracing the corners and ends. No matter what it looks like, the post is not well packed until you've had a few hard rains – then re-packed. But you may be facing time constraints – as I was – and need to get it done hastily.

Securing corners:
I use H—style bracing and crisscross the brace wire in each direction (so the brace wire forms an "X" for both dimensions of the corner). I tension the brace wire with fencing ratchet-style jacks. They require a special tool. I do not recommend the ratchets that require only a crescent wrench, as you can't get very good leverage when tightening. The ratchets that require the special tool work, by far, the best.

I crisscross brace wire on corners for a reason. 5-foot woven wire is heavy. It's about as heavy as you can get – there's a lot of metal there. When you've got that much weight and you pull it tight those corners and ends need to be solidly anchored. I've learned the hard way.

For the cross-member of the H you can notch the two vertical members with a chainsaw to hold it up, but once the brace wires are tight it isn't going anywhere. If you don't have any help, you'll probably notch the posts so that it will be held in place while your hands are busy working the ratchet.

A twist stick may be used to tension the brace wire BUT, once you stretch the fence across the brace you can't adjust or tighten further – which you will inevitably want to

do. The twist stick method works for barbed wire or electric wire [which is inappropriate for alpaca fencing] (where there's some room to twist the stick after the wire is strung), but not with woven no-climb fencing. I do not recommend the twist-stick method with woven wire (though it is the cheapest route).

My corner braces are on the inside of the fence. I've been to other farms and found the same thing. I was originally concerned that the animals would potentially get caught in the brace wire, but it hasn't happened yet and I've not heard if it happening. I've asked several people.

Gates:

There is no such thing as too many gates. There aren't very many things more annoying than having to walk one sixth of the way across the country in the wrong direction to pick up a tool you left on *that* side… five feet away. Also, it's a good idea to strategically space posts to facilitate future gates – even though you can't imagine expansion coming any time soon – it will. Additionally, 12'gates may seem large – particularly if you don't have the largest pastures, but try to get a tractor or full-size truck through your openings to see what the appropriate width gates make sense. I know that 12' will fit my Dodge Ram 2500 through – at a straight-shot, but I can only ever make a straight shot due to my particular lay-out. If you have to get through an opening at an angle then you're going to need to consider that. Position the truck/tractor at an acute angle in the future gate-area, give yourself plenty of slack then make the gate-width a little bit larger (kind of like planning the appropriate fuel-load for a 13-hr over-seas flight – a little too much is better than too little).

The gate hinge post needs to be secured just as the corners do. Once again, I use the H brace method and secure the posts with a brace wire in each direction.

For the outside perimeter gates I had gates custom made out of woven wire, no climb fencing. Mostly all my gates are 12-foot wide. For interior gates, 12-foot livestock tube gates work. Custom-made gates are expensive. I recommend for interior gates the lightest ones you can find. Heavy-duty is not necessary. Use light economy gates. They're much less expensive and, unless you're keeping raging bull elephants, probably not necessary – not to mention that light gates put much less wear-and-tear on your hinge-post and support brace.

Additionally, for lighter gates the screw-in gate hinges work just fine. The bolts (that go all the way through the hinge post) are not necessary.

I use two different types of latching mechanisms. For external gates I use two-way gate latches that are very easy to use. The gates can swing either way. In order for the gates to swing either way the gate openings have to be exact. These latching mechanisms are nice because as the gates are closed (which they are most of the time – for the external gates) the weight of the gate is held by the latch mechanism (no extra wear-and-tear on the hinge post). If the hinge post is supporting the gate's weight at all times – and the gate is heavy – it will tend to slacken and get sloppy – not good.

The other type of latch is called a kiwi clip. They're commonly used in Australia and at horse farms in the U.S. They're easily ordered on line if you don't have a nearby feed mill that stocks them. They're simple, cheap, and one-hand operable. They do not support the weight of the gate though when latched, but if you're only using them for internal gates, they're not that heavy any way and my internal gates, currently, are often open regardless.

Stretching the Fence:
To stretch the fence you need to fasten one end of the fence to one end post. You can unbraid the woven fence with pliers (line-man's pliers work best for me – though you'd think needle-nose would work best) so as to leave only the horizontal strands exposed – after having removed seven or so vertical strands – so that you can wrap the fencing around the post and wrap each strand it back to itself – in a spiral. This is extraordinarily tedious work and takes a great deal of patience – It is, however, the best way to anchor the fence end prior to stretching. If you simply staple the fence to the post the post can turn as you pull on it – which may be an undesirable outcome.

Additionally, if you cut your fence section give yourself plenty of slack of unforeseen situations, stripping, and wrapping.

You'll also need to make or buy a device to sandwich-clamp the loose end of the fence roll – tightened by large nuts and bolts. You can use two 4-foot 2x4's – sandwiching the fence end – and tightened together by approx 4 or 5 nuts/bolts through pre-drilled holes in the 2x4's. I purchased an easy-to-use fence-pulling tool from TSC which performs the same function of sandwiching the fence end and comes equipped with two large hooks (one at each end) for a chain to fasten to that will attach to a come-along (ratchet device), truck or tractor.

Now, position a truck (this is mandatory if you don't have a tractor or something heavier than a truck that you can easily move and adjust) so that the trailer hitch is in line with the fence – and a little bit beyond. Using a heavy-duty come-along – attached to the truck's trailer hitch – and a tow-chain attached to the fence-puller ratchet the fence tight. This is easier than it sounds. Pull tight. Saggy fences are embarrassing. Once the fence is taught (or as taught as it's going to be). Depending on the size of the truck, you may be ratcheting your truck toward the fence after a certain point. Begin from the fastened end to staple fence staples to the posts – working toward the truck. When you get to the last post staple the fence to it. You may want to have pre-unbraided the vertical fence strands and repeat the process that was done on the first post – or you may want to just leave it. Stripping the vertical strands and weaving those horizontal strands back to themselves be a chore – that I'm not entirely sure is necessary on the last post. It does look neat though.