

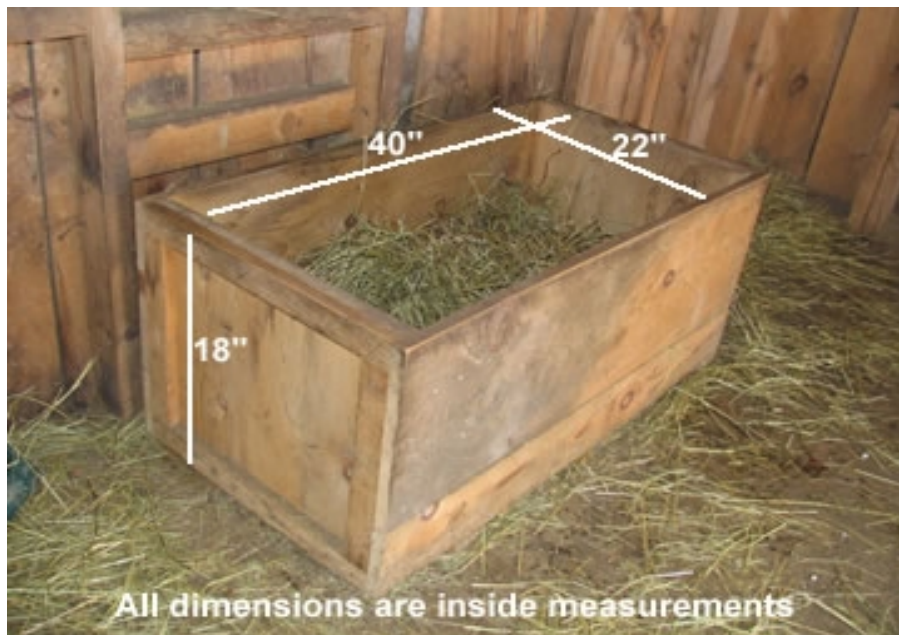
How to build an efficient Hay Feeder

The best idea we have come up with here at NEWAIM Farm is our hay feeders. We started out using a traditional feeder that hung on the wall with vertical bars to hold the hay. It seemed like more hay was dropped on the barn floor and wasted than was eaten. The cria fleeces were a disaster, full of hay that was dropped on them by the adults while the little ones tried to eat from the bottom of the feeder. Something had to change!

We decided that since alpacas graze more than browse, it would be more natural for them to get their hay from a level closer to the ground. My first attempt was a medium sized box made from some scrap plywood. This worked pretty well.

The fleeces were cleaner and there was less waste, but you still had to open a bale and serve just a few flakes at a time. This was labor intensive and you always seemed to drop some on the way from the bale to the box.

The next version did the trick. I built a box that was a little bigger than a whole bale of hay. This one I built from 1" rough sawn pine as shown in the picture below. We have a lot of mature pine trees here on the farm so most of our structures are built from material harvested from the farm. My cost to build this box is approximately \$3.00. Any sturdy non-toxic material should work. Avoid painted material and pressure treated lumber because the alpacas will chew and scratch themselves on the edges of the box.



The dimensions shown here seem to work well for the bales we get here in New England. The typical size of bales seems to vary across the country so you may need to adjust the dimensions to suit the hay in your area. The dimensions shown are for the **inside of the box**; don't forget to allow for the thickness of the material you are using when you cut the pieces to make your hay box.

Use a couple of pieces of 2"x4" to tie the bottom together and to keep the box up off the ground. Also leave about 3/4" gaps between the boards on the bottom to allow debris to fall out of the box.

Once your box is complete, place it against a wall in your shelter. This type of feeder is best used inside under cover. Drop in a bale, remove the strings and walk away. We find that one of these feeders will serve 8 to 10 adult alpacas. If you place the box directly under the opening to your hay mow you can also play "drop the bale in the box". Who said chores can't be fun.



We currently use 4 of these boxes. The one you see here has been in use for 5 years. Notice the nice patina around the edges. This is starting to look like real farm equipment!

The only refinement we have made to this design is the addition of a miniature retractable utility knife that hangs on a nail above the box. The blade only protrudes about 1/4" when fully extended. This is long enough to cut a piece of baling twine yet short enough to not inflict major damage if one of those fuzzy noses gets a little too close while you are opening the bale. The blade can be extended and retracted without removing your gloves.



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