



## BASIC ALPACA INFORMATION

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Alpacas are camelids, closely related to the llama, guanaco, and vicuna. They come from the high mountains of South America. They are hardy, adaptable animals that relate well to the Australian climate. They are ruminants and require very little in extra care and maintenance. The female alpaca is pregnant for most of her 20+ years of productive life. Gestation for a female is 340 days. Three weeks after delivering an offspring she will be re-mated. The ratio of male to female offspring is about 50/50.

Alpacas are bred for their wool. It is a specialty fibre that commands high prices in the marketplace. It differs from sheep's wool in several ways. It comes in a range of up to 30 natural colors ranging from white to browns to black and grays. The fibre is hollow and therefore lighter and also a better insulator against the cold. Also, it is not greasy and requires very little cleaning before spinning and manufacturing processes can be carried out. It has higher tensile strength, is softer than merino and more durable.

In general, alpaca care is very simple. They are hardy animals that can adapt to most conditions. Their curious nature and individual personalities make them a most appealing pet as well as an environmentally friendly herd animal. Alpacas browse when grazing leaving the root structures of the pasture intact. They also have a soft, padded foot that is gentle on the delicate Australian soils.

**FEEDING:** Alpacas are herbivores and graze on the available pasture. They are very efficient converters of the fodder that they eat and do not require a high protein diet. However, the pasture must contain all the minerals that they need. Supplementation is not necessary, except in summer when food is scarce. Heavily pregnant and lactating females require more than other groups. Alpacas create dung piles in the poorest sections of the pasture and shun these areas for grazing, thereby avoiding some internal parasite problems associated with other livestock.

**MAINTENANCE:** Routines vary from farm to farm, but most breeders will agree that alpacas should be given 5 in 1 or 6 in 1 vaccinations twice a year. Occasional nail and teeth trimming is necessary. Alpacas do not get fly-strike or foot rot. Recent studies in Australia have shown that drenching alpacas is unnecessary. High worm counts were almost non-existent on all the farms that were studied. However, crias born in the early months of the year were more susceptible and drenched on an individual basis when necessary. Picking up the dung piles during the autumn months proved to be more efficient in eliminating worm counts.

**SHEARING:** Shearing is an annual event that usually takes place during the spring. Most breeders prefer to relieve the animals of their warm coats before the heat of summer sets in. Our fibre co-op has given guidelines for fleece lengths that are usually met with an annual shearing. Because alpacas have a long neck that can get in the way, they are stretched out on the floor or a table for this exercise. Suri fleeces are often a few centimeters longer than the huacaya. In addition, the suri fibre contains less medullation and greater uniformity of micron. Therefore, with the exception of the legs and belly, the entire fleece is placed in one bag.

**BIRTHING:** Alpaca births are generally trouble-free. They usually give birth during daylight hours and seem to prefer sunny days for the event. Due to the extreme temperatures of their native homeland in the altiplano, birthing had to take place between 10:00 and 3:00 for the cria to have the best chance of survival. This instinct has continued here in Australia even though our climate is different. Alpacas can be bred any time of year. However, winter birthing is often avoided in colder areas of the country.

**JOHNNES DISEASE:** Alpacas are potential carriers of bovine JD. The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has recently created a Market Assurance Program (MAP) that allows breeders to test alpacas for JD and then (subject to acceptable management practices) issue a certificate stating that the herd is free of the disease.

For more information, please contact us on 08 7200 0809 or visit our website at [www.suri.com.au](http://www.suri.com.au).