



## ALPACA CARE

In general, alpaca care is very simple. They are hardy animals who 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 in tact. They also have a soft, padded foot that is gentle on the delicate Australian soils.

**FEEDING:** Alpacas are herbivores and mainly graze on the available pasture. Obesity is our biggest dietary problem as they are very efficient utilizers of the fodder that they eat. Alpacas do not require a high protein diet. However, you must be sure that the pasture contains 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. This allows them to graze on other areas and avoid some 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 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.

**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. However the incidents have been very rare and most breeders do not believe it to be a big threat.