



ALPACA FACTS AND BASIC STANDARDS OF CARE

ABOUT ALPACAS

The Alpaca is a domesticated species of South American camelid.

Alpacas are members of the camelid family. The camels that most people are familiar with are the ones with humps. However, there are four other camelids (without humps) that are indigenous to South America: two of them, llamas and alpacas, have been domesticated for thousands of years; whereas the other two varieties, guanacos and vicunas, continue to roam in wild herds today.

The alpaca comes in two breed-types: huacaya (pronounced wah-KI-ah) and suri (SOO-ree). Huacayas, the more common type, account for about 90% of all alpacas, and have fluffy, crimped fleece that gives the animals a teddy bear-like appearance. Suris, on the other hand, grow silky, lustrous fleece that drapes gracefully in beautiful pencil-locks

Lifespan: 15-20 Years

Gestation: averages 345 days (11.5 months), but in fact may range from 320 to 376 days. Due to the lengthy gestation period, Alpacas generally produce a single cria per year.

Adult Weight: 100-200 pounds

Adult Height: 32-39 inches

Cria Weight: 12-15 pounds

Sounds an Alpaca Makes:

Humming to communicate happiness or express concern or stress.

Alarm Call to signal they are frightened or angry with another alpaca.

Orgling is the sound a male “serenades” the female with during breeding.

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BASIC STANDARDS OF CARE FOR YOUR ALPACAS

Alpacas are domesticated South American members of the camelid family and cousins of llama. They exist throughout the US and internationally. They are approved as livestock animals (ref) with fiber production as their purpose. In addition, alpaca exist as breeding, production or pet quality. Care and handling of alpaca is unique due their nature as an intelligent herd animal. Understanding their care and handling will benefit their lifespan and production characteristics. With proper care alpacas can enjoy many years of good health.

Alpaca thrive in an environment where the relationship with people and other animals is peaceful, basic security is provided and activities fit their nature. Region specific conditions present variables to maintaining the health and well-being of the animals. Consideration for nutrition, physical environment, shelter, social environment, routine husbandry, safe handling and safe keeping will benefit alpaca ownership for an enjoyable experience.

1. **WATER:** Alpaca should have continuous access to potable drinking water. Water should be cool enough to touch to encourage consumption and avoid dehydration.
2. **NUTRITION:** Alpaca should have nourishment adequate to sustain life and health. Daily access to forage such as nutritious pasture or hay should be provided to ensure adequate sources of protein and other nutrients. Supplements might be required.
3. **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:** The health of the alpaca will benefit from an environment that is protected and maintained to prevent undue stress. This area should be cleaned to eliminate manure and urine build up. Fencing should be sufficient height and strength to both contain the alpaca and protect from predators. Fencing should be secure to prevent alpaca from becoming entangled. Barbed wire and electric fence are not recommended. Alpaca should be safeguarded from injury or death within their defined living environment and/or when traveling (ie, trailer size adequate size and ventilated). **Alpaca are prey animals and should never be used as guard animals.**
4. **SHELTER:** Alpaca should have natural or man-made shelter that enables them to find relief in adverse weather conditions and environmental conditions (ie, extreme heat, humidity, precipitation, waterlogged ground/standing water). A sheltered area should be ventilated and also provides protection for hay, fans or other necessities. Alpaca appreciate an open sheltered area to allow them to visualize their surroundings due to their prey instincts. The sheltered area must allow for the ability to stand, lie down, rest and reasonably move about.
5. **MOBILITY:** Alpaca should have a living area through which they can move freely and exercise independently. They are browsing and grazing animals and need the space to accommodate their nature. This can be a pasture area or 'dry lot' (with supplemented nutrition). A general guideline in hot, humid climates is a stocking ratio of 5 alpaca per acre. Space requirements are dictated by the herd composition.
6. **SOCIALIZATION:** Alpacas are herd animals and should not live alone **without at least one companion animal of the same sex.** and should be in sight of other herd animals. Alpaca cria (a baby alpaca under six months) should always be allowed to remain with their dam a minimum of six months to develop normal behaviors and resulting good nutrition due to maturation of the forestomach. **Crias should NEVER be sold as pets for the purpose of bottle feeding.** Bottle feeding should take place in a herd environment and only when medically necessary to ensure the health of the dam and/or cria. **A cria should not be raised apart from other alpacas.** Alpaca have a gentle and curious nature but in general might not act appropriately when interacting with people. They have a highly sophisticated body language that might include spitting, kicking or running.
7. **SAFE HANDLING:** Halters should be used for leading and not kept on the animal in their environment for extended periods of time. Halter fit is imperative to prevent life-threatening situations in addition to helping the alpaca feel comfortable. Alpaca secured via tying without supervision at any time should be avoided.
8. **HUSBANDRY:** A camelid experienced veterinarian and supportive mentor are beneficial for successful ownership. Regions vary in requirements and needs. Physical assessment to evaluate weight, body score, membrane color, fiber coat changes, teeth and toenail growth and general condition help to determine health needs (ie, parasite management, vaccinations) diet, environmental and other modifications. A shearing schedule must be adopted which will prevent excessive fiber growth to avoid heat stress.
9. **CRUELTY and NEGLECT:** Alpaca should be reasonably safeguarded from cruel treatment and actions that endanger life or health or cause avoidable suffering. Alpaca should have a physical appearance free from signs of serious neglect. Signs of serious neglect may include such things as crippled ambulation due to severely curled toenails, ingrown halters, an excess of fiber, or living conditions not meeting the mini-

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE I PURCHASE MY ALPACAS

Familiarity with the 24/7 farming lifestyle
Type of business you are planning ie pets, fiber, breeding
Shelter type and location
Fencing and protection
Pasture type and size
Separation for males, females, age groups and special needs
Power access and cost
Availability and storage for hay and feed
Manure management
Shearing
Herd Health - nail and teeth trimming, weights
Fecal testing and timing
Veterinarian with alpaca experience on call
Livestock trailer
Equipment needs and storage - manure spreader, tractors, mowers
Fiber processing such as processing, costs,
Supplies to purchase such as halters, leads, nail clippers, feeders
Tax consequences and financial observations
Mentor availability and assistance

Ref IRS publication # 225 "The Farmer's Tax Guide"

NOTES: