

# Fact Sheet - Alpacas



## TERMS:

Macho	is an adult male deer
Hembra	is an adult female deer
Cria	is an alpaca from birth or weaning (approx. 4-5 months old)
Weaner	is an alpaca from weaning to 12 months old
Tui	is an alpaca from 12 months to 24 months
Herd	is a group of alpacas



## INTERESTING FACTS:

- Alpaca have padded feet and do much less damage than hooved farm animals.
- Alpacas are very hardy animals and require little attention.
- Alpacas are similar to llamas but much smaller.
- Llamas are used as pack animals but alpacas were bred specifically for their fleece.
- Alpaca fleece has two distinct qualities. The finest part of the entire fleece comes from the back and sides. The lesser quality fibre comes from the animal's neck and legs.
- Alpaca fleece is similar to sheep fleece but does not contain lanolin and therefore does not repel water.
- Alpaca fleece is warmer than sheep fleece and is not prickly like wool. Alpaca fibre is smooth and silky to touch.
- The fleece is removed from alpacas in the same manner as a sheep is sheared. The fibre is then combed, carded and, after a simple washing process, is ready to spin.
- Dyes are not required when using alpaca fibre as the fleece comes in a wide range of natural colours including black, white, fawn, silver, champagne, shades of brown, shades of grey, etc.



## HISTORY:

They originate in the high altitude region of the Andean mountains in South America. The climate in this area consists of hot days and freezing nights.

Alpacas were first imported into Australia in 1858 but none of the alpacas are known to have survived.

It wasn't until 1988 when the next alpacas arrived. Breeding stock from Chile and Peru has been used to increase the size of the current alpaca herd. They adapted well to Australian climatic conditions. Today, in Australia there are approximately 25,000 alpacas owned by some 1,600 breeders.



## BREEDS OF ALPACAS:

Alpacas are part of the camelid family - that is, they are related to camels and they originated in South America. Llamas and alpacas are two of the four species living in South America. There are two breeds of alpacas - the Huacaya and the Suri.

Length of gestation for the Huacaya and the Suri breeds range from 341-345 days respectively. In the Andes in Peru, 90% of all births occur between 7am and 1pm. It is considered that this gives the best survival chance to the newborns before it gets too cold at night.

The **Huacaya** is the most common breed in South America and Australia. Its body is densely covered with fleece from its head extending down its legs. The Huacaya grows a "corkscrew" straight fibre.

The **Suris** is less common than Huacayas and Australia has only a small number of Suris alpacas. Their fleece falls straight down from their body and looks similar to long, thin locks, very similar to "dreadlocks". Their fleece has a silkier feel than the Huacaya. Length of

## HABITATE / DIET:

Alpacas like high fibre, low protein grasses, including Australian native species of grasses.

They are the most environmentally friendly of our agricultural animals because they have soft padded feet and not hooves like horses, cattle, sheep and goats. As minimal damage is done to the land, pasture regrowth is faster and therefore there is less soil erosion.

## HERD PROTECTORS:

Although alpacas are quiet and friendly, their survival in the harsh environment of the Andean mountains of South America depended upon developing instincts to fend off predators.

Alpacas are, by nature, a herd animal. Both males and females are protective of each other and especially of their young. As a result of their protective instinct, and the fact that alpacas adapt easily to new surroundings, farmers began raising alpacas with their flocks of sheep. This tactic proved very successful as the alpacas, not only become members of the flock, but also their protectors.

Alpacas have very good eyesight and remain very alert. When danger is sensed, an alarm is sounded and all the adults herd the young into a circle to protect them against any danger. Then the leaders of the herd charge the intruder stomping, spitting, kicking and /or biting. This generally surprises the predator and he/she retreats to a safe distance.

• *For photos and more information refer to [www.alpaca.com](http://www.alpaca.com)*



## ALPACA PRODUCTS:

Raising alpacas is a fledgling industry and will be based on the breeding of future stock for the foreseeable future. However, as a result of the high quality of the fibre available here in Australia, the sale of alpaca fibre is increasing each year.

Alpaca fibre is used to make knitted and woven products similar to that of sheep's wool. In South America where alpacas are common many products are made, e.g. jumpers, hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, etc. Other parts of the world mainly produce selected items of clothing and bedding, e.g. jumpers, socks, coats and doonas.

Clothing that is made from alpaca fibre is strong, light, very smooth to touch, and because it comes in a variety of natural colours, does not require the use of dyes. These attributes enable light but warm clothing to be made.

The lesser quality fleece (neck and legs) is used to make other items like doonas. Doonas or comforters made from alpaca fibre are very light but incredibly warm.

