



## Introduction to Alpacas

The North American Alpaca Federation  
[www.naalpaca.org](http://www.naalpaca.org)

### What's an alpaca and why do we seem to be seeing more and more of them?

- Alpacas are cousins of the camel and the llama. North America is their original home.
- And like the bison, we are repopulating North America with a national herd – welcoming them home.
- Alpacas, like sheep, chew their cuds and graze on grasses (very efficient lawn mowers).

### What do you do with alpacas?

- Raise and breed them for profit
- Sell their fleece to make luxurious and elegant clothing.
- Sell their manure, nicknamed 'beans' because of the shape as fertilizer.

### What's special about alpaca fleece?

- Think cashmere. Alpaca is one of the finest, brightest and softest fleeces (known as fiber) in the world.
- Being rare, and coupled with great fleece that is stronger and warmer than wool, softer and more durable than cashmere, alpaca fiber is costly and in high demand by those who seek rarity and quality. Alpaca fiber is made into sweaters, socks, coats, hats, gloves, blankets, ponchos, bedding, and on and on.
- Here – feel this. This is alpaca. A breeder who doesn't wear his product is like a Mercedes salesman who drives a Ford.
- And alpaca is Green.

### Green?

- You're probably wearing cotton – herbicides, pesticides are needed to grow a crop
- Own any nylon? – petroleum product. We're dangerously dependent on fossil fuels.
- America is Going Green – as in conservation, anti-pollution, and so on.
- Alpacas are carbon-neutral, eco-friendly.
- Unlike sheep, alpaca fiber does not contain lanolin. Lanolin is what makes most people itch when wearing wool. While wool is treated with chemicals to wash out the lanolin, some of it remains. That's the odor you smell when wool gets wet. No lanolin in alpaca.

### What is the temperament of an alpaca?

- Gentle and submissive herd animals. Social and docile grazers. Sweet natured. Alpaca's are intelligent, curious and observant. If you leave a gate unlatched, they'll know. They can be trained to do tricks, and yes, some have been house broken.
- No upper teeth – can't bite you.
- Perfectly safe around children.
- They get along with (though usually ignore) goats, sheep, donkeys, horses, cats and family dogs.

### **How big do alpacas get?**

- Alpaca adults weigh an average of 125 to 175 pounds and stand about 3 feet at the shoulder, 4 ½ feet at the head.

### **Do they make sounds?**

- They hum. These are usually comforting noises, indicative of contentment. But they can squeal if separated from their baby and give off a high-pitched shriek alarm if threatened with predators. They can also ‘cluck’ which is a warm calming sound.

### **What color are alpacas?**

- Alpacas come in 16 natural colors – and various shades, ranging from brilliant white, through beiges, browns, blacks and greys.

### **How long do they live?**

- We think they live an average of about 15-20 years but as they are very rare and new to North America (20 years and counting) we’re not entirely sure.

### **Why are alpacas rare?**

- Alpacas do not litter. Only one baby (called a cria) at a time. And the gestation period averages 11.5 months plus or minus a month!
- There are only about 4 million alpacas in the world, the majority in Peru. Bolivia and Chile have a sizeable amount, and Australia, the US and Canada has ever-growing herds. And alpaca farms are popping up in China, Italy, and everywhere else.
- The alpaca population was almost wiped out during the Spanish invasion of the Inca civilization.
- But being a hardy animal, they have survived and are on the mend. Try surviving in the high Andes mountains of Peru. Considered one of the most inhospitable places on earth. Alpacas can thrive there.
- How many alpacas are in the US?
- We have about 175,000 – and growing.

### **Can I have a pet alpaca?**

- Certainly. Although two are better, since they are herd animals and prefer the company of others.

### **How much space do they need?**

- Surprising little. You can easily raise alpacas on small acreage (if you are zone for livestock). In fact some breeders raise about 25 alpacas on 5 acres.

### **How much and what do alpacas eat?**

- They eat about 2 pounds of grass/hay per day. (that’s only 2-3 bales of hay per month!)
- They like shredded raw carrots

### **What do alpacas cost?**

- For a pet quality alpaca the price ranges in the hundreds of dollars. But like horses, cows, pigs and such, champion breeding stock sells in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.