

Alpaca Care and Fibre

There are two types of alpaca, the huacaya and the suri, which differ primarily in the character of their fibre. The huacaya, the most common alpaca breed, has a crimped or wavy fleece whereas the suri has straight, lustrous, fine fibre. In full fleece, the huacaya has a full, fluffy appearance, while the suri is elegantly draped in long wavy locks. Alpacas come in 22 natural colours! Prized for its unique silky feel and superb handle, alpaca fibre is highly sought after by the textile makers of Britain, Europe and Japan. Various worsted and woollen mills in western Canada offer custom processing of alpaca fibre - carding, blending, dyeing and processing into yarn, fabric and felt. Sweaters, blankets, mitts, socks, shawls, hats, duvets can be purchased through various home based businesses.

As the future unfolds, alpacas and their beautiful fleece will take their place at the head of specialty fibre industries world-wide. They are clean, intelligent, peaceful animals that are easily handled and are safe around children; caring for them is not difficult. Fences should be designed to keep out dogs, coyotes and other predators. A three-sided enclosure or lean-to is adequate for shade, as well as winter wind protection. Alpacas require less than 2 pounds of low protein hay daily, and fresh water. They require little space; 1/8th of an acre per animal is often sufficient, making them an ideal small acreage livestock. They defecate in fixed areas, thus clean-up and parasite control is a relatively easy job. Alpaca droppings are almost odourless, and are high in nitrogen and potassium, making them an excellent fertilizer. They are easily transported in a pick-up, van or trailer and usually lie down in transit. Alpacas are extremely hardy and adaptable to most climates, elevations and conditions.