

Alpaca maintenance

- **Teeth trimming.** Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation about trimming alpaca teeth. And that can result in cruelty. **The teeth should not be trimmed unless they are a significant problem** in terms of the alpaca's health or welfare. If teeth trimming is necessary, seek the advice of your vet.
- **Shearing.** Even if you don't intend to sell the fleece, your alpaca should still be shorn each spring for the welfare of the animal. If an alpaca is not shorn, it is likely to overheat in the summer and this can cause distress and health problems for the alpaca.
- **Foot trimming.** Unless your property is permanently dry and rocky, your alpaca's toenails will overgrow and need to be trimmed occasionally and more regularly if the pasture conditions are soft and wet.
- **Fencing.** Alpacas are generally much gentler on fences than other livestock. Fencing that is good enough for sheep will be good enough for alpacas. Electric fencing is unnecessary and barbed wire fencing should never be used.
- **Rotational grazing** can help reduce the risk of clostridial disease by reducing the build up of bacterial spores in the pasture. It can also help reduce the build up of internal parasites. And it can help reduce weeds and increase the desirable species in your pasture.

Alpaca welfare

- Because they have no lanolin in the fleece and have little body fat, alpacas are especially susceptible to **cold exposure** – especially in wet weather, when the fleece gets waterlogged, or in prolonged cold weather. In Tasmanian conditions, **shelter of some kind is essential.**
- The myth about being able to survive long periods without water is not true for domesticated alpacas. They will drink around 5 litres a day and may actually sit in water troughs on a hot day to cool off.
- Alpacas are social animals, so you should ensure your alpaca has at least one other alpaca for company.

The information in this pamphlet is general advice only and is intended for smallholders and hobby farmers. You should always get professional advice for your specific situation from your local vet.

For more general information, contact the Dept of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment on 1300368 550 or the Australian Alpaca Association at: www.alpaca.asn.au



ALPACAS



Some basic health and welfare tips from DPIPWE

About alpacas

- Young alpacas are called crias. Females are called hembras and males are called machos.
- Hembras can start breeding after 12 months, but matings are usually unsuccessful until the hembra reaches at least 45-50kg of weight. The gestation period is around 11.5 months, but this can vary greatly.
- Hembras usually give birth to single crias. Twins are rare.
- If looked after properly, alpacas can live to over twenty years.
- There are two breeds of alpaca, with the huacaya being much more common than the suri.
- You can run alpacas in the same paddock as sheep or goats. You shouldn't run them in the same paddock as horses or cattle because of the risk they will be kicked and injured.
- Alpacas respond well to handling and most are easily trained to the halter. However, they don't enjoy being cuddled or touched around the head.
- Alpacas are sometimes used as guardians for sheep flocks, particularly for lambing ewes.

Major health issues

- Of the clostridial diseases, **enterotoxaemia and tetanus** are the most common for alpacas. While there are no vaccines specifically approved for alpacas, a 3-in-1 or 5-in-1 clostridial vaccine for cattle is generally used.
- Alpacas in Tasmanian winters are susceptible to **vitamin D deficiency**, which can show up as rickets. Crias should have a course of vitamin D injections, 6 to 8 weeks apart, during the bone development period (ie from about 2 months before birth until they are adult at 18+ months). Older alpacas should be injected every 10 weeks or so during winter.
- Alpacas are susceptible to **facial eczema** and that can be fatal. It is caused by a fungus that can grow in dead pasture litter in warm and moist conditions. In Tasmania, late summer/early autumn is the greatest risk period. That risk is increased if a paddock is slashed and the cuttings are left on the ground to dry out.
- **Selenium deficiency** can be a problem in many parts of Tasmania. If soil tests on your property indicate this may be a problem, you should supplement the diet. This can be done with a selenium drench or a selenium supplement in the feed.
- **Rye grass staggers** can be a problem in rye grass dominant pastures between February and May. If it occurs, move the alpacas quietly to a safer pasture and, in the longer term, increase the percentage of other grasses, legumes or low endophyte varieties of rye grass in the pasture.

Other husbandry issues

- Under ideal conditions, alpacas generally have few **worm problems**. But on most smallholdings worms can be a risk to alpaca health. It is worth seeking advice from your vet on a worm control program for your specific situation. In most cases, that program will include the use of drench. There are no drenches approved for alpacas but sheep drenches are generally found to be effective.
- There has been an increase in the number of reported cases of **lumpy jaw** in alpacas in Tasmania. Check your alpaca's mouth regularly for any sign of swelling around the jaw or the teeth on the bottom jaw being out of alignment with the dental pad on the top jaw.
- As with all ruminant animals, **introduce any change of feed gradually**. This is especially so if introducing grain as a supplementary feed, otherwise they may get grain poisoning which can be fatal.
- **Johne's disease** is a serious wasting disease that can affect alpacas. If bringing alpacas, sheep, goats, deer or cattle onto the property, check the Johne's disease status of your source. Where possible, source them from a herd or flock in the Market Assurance Program (or MAP).

All livestock owners are required by law to report any signs of an emergency animal disease. If you think your alpaca is showing the signs, please contact your local vet or the DPIPWE all hours hotline on 1800 675 888 without delay.