

Facts & Figures About Canadian Camelids

In General:

- Llamas, alpacas, guanacos and vicunas are all members of the camelid family
- A camelid is a cud-chewing, camel-like animal that does not have a hump.
- Llamas were reintroduced to North America over 100 years ago; alpacas were imported in the 1980s
- Adult alpacas weigh between 125 and 175 pounds on average and have a life span of 20-25 years
- Today there are an estimated 6000 llamas in Canada, and over 25 000 alpacas
- Alpacas and llamas are popular in Canada for their fibre
- Llamas weigh 280-350 pounds on average and have a life span of 20 years
- Llamas have a three-compartment stomach and chew their cud. Ruminants, which are also cud-chewers, have a four-compartment stomach.
- An alpaca stands 34-36 inches at the withers
- A llama stands 40-47 inches at the withers
- The average alpaca herd is 8-10 animals, but can range from 2 to 100
- Most alpacas in Canada are in Alberta and British Columbia, but interest and numbers in Ontario are growing



You were asking about...Camelids

What is a Camelid?

A camelid is a cud-chewing, camel like animal that does not have a hump. Llamas, alpacas, guanacos and vicunas are all members of the camelid family.

History of Camelids:

Alpacas were domesticated over 5,000 years ago by Incan tribes in South America. These animals are originally from the Andes Mountains in South America, in particular, from Peru, Bolivia and Chile. The first recorded alpacas in Canada were in the 1980s, but large imports of the animals occurred in the early 1990s. Today, in Canada, alpacas are raised primarily for their fibre. There are over 25,000 registered alpacas in Canada, and this number is expected to continue to grow.

In the highlands of Peru, some 4,000-5,000 years ago, llamas were domesticated, placing them among the oldest domestic animals in the

world. Llamas were used primarily as pack animals and were an integral part of the Inca economy. Llama fibre was used for clothing, saddlebags, and made into products and weaving tools while their dung was used as a source of fuel and also as an essential fertilizer for potato production. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, llamas were reintroduced to their original North American homeland. Today there are an estimated 6,000 llamas in Canada.



Breeds

Alpacas and Llamas are not divided into breeds, but they are classed by the type of fibre they have. The Huacaya is the most common breed and is known for its crimped or wavy fleece. The animal has a full, fluffy appearance, having a soft bonnet of wool on the forehead and the dense body wool grows straight out from the body. The other breed, called the Suri, has straight, fine fibre that hangs in pencil-like flocks.

Alpacas are sometimes called Peruvian, Chilean or Bolivian. This refers to the country which the animals' ancestors originated from. Peruvian and Bolivian breeding programs have emphasized white fleece for ease of dyeing, while Chilean breeding programs are known for having the full range of colours, popular with people who do not want to use dyes.

Housing: Where do Camelids Live?

Camelids normally live outdoors, with a three-sided enclosure for protection from the elements. One acre can sustain five to eight alpacas, or three to five llamas. During extreme cold, an enclosed shed is necessary to keep camelids warm.

Fences should be at least four feet high and it is recommended that the fence be made of woven wire, wooden rails, chain link or electric fence. Barbed wire is not recommended. All fences should also be dog proof. If threatened, alpacas can jump over four foot fences, so in many cases fences of five feet or higher are recommended.

Llamas and alpacas are very social animals, and do not like to be kept alone. Group housing is necessary with camelids, and they are comfortable with many other species of animals. Llamas are used by sheep and goat farmers as guard animals, to protect the flock or herd from predators such as wolves, coyotes and dogs. Alpacas are known to get along with sheep, goats, dogs, cats, donkeys and horses.

Because camelids are easy to raise, can be handled by anyone, are safe around children and are adaptable to most climates, with low space requirements, they are an ideal hobby farm animal.

About the Life Cycle of Camelids...

Female alpacas are normally first bred at 18 months of age. Their gestation period averages 11½ months, and they give birth to one offspring, called a cria, once a year. Alpaca crias are 14 to 20 pounds at birth. Adult alpacas weigh between 125-175 pounds on average and have a life span of 20 to 25 years. Male alpacas are usually larger than female alpacas, especially when looking at breeding animals.

Female llamas are bred between 14 and 24 months of age, depending on size and development. Gestation averages 350 days and a single offspring is produced. The average weight of a normal newborn llama (called a cria) is 25-30 pounds. Mature llamas weigh an average of 280-350 pounds. Full growth is reached by the fourth year, and while there are no obvious differences between the sexes, males tend to be slightly larger. The llama's life span is 20 years on average.

Natural breeding is used with alpacas and llamas. They are induced ovulators, meaning the act of mating causes them to ovulate. As long as the female is receptive, they can be bred at any time during the year.

Both alpacas and llamas can have twins, but the occurrence is very rare.

Nutrition: What do Camelids Eat?

Camelids are cud-chewing herbivores, meaning they eat plant matter and digest it in a series of three stomach compartments. Camelids chew and swallow, and the feed enters the first stomach, called C1. There, it is mixed with fluids containing bacteria and other microorganisms to help break down the cellulose fibres. The llama or alpaca will then "chew its cud": regurgitate the food and re-chew it into smaller particles. The chewed cud is swallowed again and eventually passes into the second stomach (C2) for further processing. The food is then passed into the third and final compartment (C3) where the final steps of digestion take place. Llamas and alpacas are highly adaptable feeders, being both grazers (grasses and forbs) and browsers (shrubs and trees).

Alpacas eat about two pounds of hay or grass (one to two percent of their body weight) and almost one pound of supplement per day. Alpacas do well on marginal lands. Supplements contain a mixture of vitamins and minerals to ensure alpacas' nutrition needs are met. As with all animals, alpacas need constant access to clean, fresh water. Llamas have relatively low protein requirements due to their efficient digestive systems, and therefore can be kept on a variety of pastures or hay. They eat about two to four percent of their body weight in dry matter each day. Water should be available at all times and should be clean and fresh.

Transporting Camelids:

Camelids are normally transported in trucks, vans or trailers and prefer to lie down during transit. Camelids can climb into almost any vehicle which will accommodate their size. Halter training is required to teach camelids how to enter and exit the variety of possible transportation vehicles.

CAMELID TRIVIA

- Llamas and alpacas are closely related to camels
- Llamas and alpacas have only been in North America for a short time
- Guanacos and vicunas are wild relatives of the llamas and alpacas. Some say modern alpacas were created through breeding programs with vicunas.
- Alpaca and llama fibre is hypoallergenic
- Camelids only have one baby at a time
- Camelids come in a range of 22 shades of colour
- Alpacas are usually a solid colour
- Llamas can be a solid colour or spotted
- Camelids are great pack animals and are well suited to walking on rough terrain
- Llamas only like to be pet on their backs and necks, where their hair is the thickest
- Alpacas and llamas only spit when they feel threatened or to establish a pecking order at feeding time
- Llamas are highly social animals and therefore need the companionship of another llama
- Llamas communicate their moods with a series of tail, body and ear postures, and vocalizations.
- Llamas require less water than most domestic animals; they tend to drink more during the summer and when lactating, and less during the winter and when on lush green pastures.
- Crias (llamas or alpacas under one year old) have the finest fibre, and their fibre is the most sought after.
- Llama fibre has a tensile strength and durability three times that of wool
- Guard Llamas are highly successful in preventing predation in sheep and goat flocks
- Alpacas very rarely spit, usually only when they are scared or overexcited
- Alpacas usually lay down in transit
- Alpacas communicate through soft humming noises and unique body language
- With the exception of mohair, alpacas produce the strongest animal fibre in the world
- One acre can sustain between five and eight alpacas, making them the ideal hobby farm animal
- Alpacas get along with goats, sheep, donkeys, horses, cats and family dogs.
- Camelids are the oldest domesticated animals selectively bred for quality fibre.

Camelid Dictionary

Here are some terms you will need to know at a camelid farm

- **Camelid:** a small, camel-like animal without a hump. It includes alpacas, llamas, guanacos and vicunas.
- **Cria:** a camelid under one year old
- **Cud:** food which has been partially digested in the first stomach compartment and is then chewed and swallowed again to finish digestion in the second and third stomach compartments
- **Dam:** a female alpaca that has given birth to a cria
- **Fleece:** a llama's or alpaca's fibre after it has been shorn off, in one piece
- **Guard hair:** the tough outer hair on llamas which can be used when making insoles, rugs, quilt batting, etc but is not used in clothing
- **Hembra:** the Spanish term for adult female alpacas
- **Herd sire:** a male alpaca used for breeding purposes
- **Machos:** the Spanish term for adult male alpacas
- **Maiden:** a young female alpaca that has not yet given birth
- **Underhair:** the soft, silky fibre alpacas and llamas are known for, used in making clothing and blankets
- **Weanlings:** a young camelid who has been weaned, but is under one year old. Also called a tuis.

✓ Camelid
FACT SHEET

Camelids: Their products and their uses



In Canada, camelids are mainly bred for their fibre, which is hypoallergenic. This fibre has a hollow (or medullated) core, so it is actually hair rather than wool. The structure of the fibre is what gives it the strength and high insulating properties it is known for. Alpaca fibre is as soft as cashmere, and stronger and warmer than wool. The fibre can be easily dyed and cleaned, and the fibre comes in 22 natural colours

including white, brown, black, grey, fawn and any combination of these colours. Alpacas are normally a solid colour, with spots being rare. The fibre is non allergenic and repels water. Prized for its unique silky feel and superb handle, alpaca fibre is highly sought after by the large textile manufacturers of Europe and Asia. Canadian alpacas are shorn annually and their fibre is processed into a number of products including sweaters, socks and blankets.

Llama fibre ranges in colour from white to black, with shades of grey, brown, red and roan. As with alpacas, there are 22 recognized shades. Markings on the fibre can range from solid to spotted. Their fibre is soft and fine, and is used for protection against cold, and acts as an insulator for heat. The llama fibre can be harvested yearly by clipping or shearing and made into beautiful garments and blankets. Once the guard hair is removed, llama fibre is comparable to that of the alpaca. The guard hair is rough, and is normally used for stuffing duvets and quilts or making insoles. The yearly wool harvest per llama will produce fleece weighing three to eight pounds and be four to seven inches in length.

Alpaca fibre and llama fibre with the guard hair removed has a variety of uses. It can be made into socks and sweaters, blankets, or even skirts and suits. Some alpaca farmers who have mills on their farms sell balls of yarn made from alpaca or llama fibre, or blends of the fibres with sheep wool.

Camelids are hardy animals that have been traditionally used as a pack animal. They are very useful for hiking, and do well on rough terrains. Their small size when compared to other pack animals such as horses

makes their impact on trails minimal, and makes them well suited to narrow trails.

Some llama or alpaca farmers have trained their animals to pull carts. Not all llamas and alpacas are suited to pulling a cart, but many are quite good at it. The driving purposes of llamas and alpacas can be put to use in show rings, for pleasure, or for work such as hauling wood or cleaning out pens.

Llamas have been used successfully to protect sheep and goats from predators such as coyotes.

In South America, llamas and alpacas are also used for their meat, however this is not a common use in North America.

Who to Call:

Canadian Llama and Alpaca Association
Visit: www.claacanada.com

Alpaca Canada
Visit: www.alpacainfo.ca

Llama Canada
Visit: www.llamacanada.ca

Alpaca Ontario
Visit: www.alpacaontario.ca

Ontario Camelids Association
Email: ontariocamelids@yahoo.com

BC Llama and Alpaca Association
Visit: www.bclaa.com

Manitoba Alpaca Club
Visit: www.manitobaalpacaclub.ca

Pacific Coast Alpaca Network
Visit: www.pacapacific.wordpress.com

Saskatchewan Alpaca Breeder Network
Visit: www.sabn.net

Sources:

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/llamaalpaca.html>

<http://www.llamacanada.ca>

<http://www.alpacainfo.ca>

<http://www.kpfarm.com>

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Prepared by:



Farm & Food Care Ontario
www.farmfoodcare.org
519-837-1326
info@farmfoodcare.org