

Argenton Alpacas

Owning Alpacas

You have read about alpacas, seen the photos and maybe even visited a farm to look at and touch them. You have thought what a great idea to own three or four or maybe more. So you want to buy some but aren't sure what's involved. Well here is a very brief summary of what you need to become an Alpaca owner. Beyond this information you will find a number of publications, websites and associations that can help you fulfil your dream of Alpaca ownership.



Alpaca Basics

The Alpaca's natural habitat is the Altiplano, the foothills of the Andes with some extremes of temperatures. They eat when it's plentiful in the summer and make the most of what they can find in the winter.



Their thick fleece is the perfect protection for the dry cold winters there. However, they do adapt to other climates and

here in France with Temperate and Mediterranean climate they may need a little help.

They can withstand cold conditions and are happy even in snow. Their fleece is water resistant but they will not be happy in cold, wet weather and in very hot conditions they will become stressed.

There are two breeds of Alpacas.

The Huacaya and the Suri

Female Alpacas are known as Hembras and male Alpacas are Machos. A baby is called a Cria

Alpacas come in over 20 natural shades and mixes of colour

Alpacas are members of the camelid family which includes Llamas, Camels, Vicunas and Guanacos

Alpacas are not "wild". They originally were domesticated Vicunas but selective breeding has created a separate species.

Alpacas are grazing animals and so walk while they eat. In the foothills of the Andes they will prefer to graze on short grasses in the same area for a day or two and then move on. In dry conditions they will eat long grasses and shrubs. They are ruminants and so are very effective at recycling nutrients from their food. In their natural environment they get all the minerals and nourishment they need .

Alpacas live up to 25 years. Females start breeding at about 18 months of age and males will become mature at around three years although both can start earlier. The



females will usually carry their babies for between 330 and 350 days before giving birth. They give birth standing up and normally do not need any intervention. Females become receptive to males after around two weeks and so can have a baby every year which is not abnormal for Alpaca breeding programmes.

In South America, their natural enemies are Pumas and wild dogs. In the open, they can easily outrun these animals. The dominant male or female in the Alpaca group will usually send out an alarm call if they see any unfamiliar creature and can attack small creatures if they feel that their young may be threatened.

Alpacas in the wild are hardy animals and are naturally healthy animals that rarely need outside attention. On Peruvian farms large herds may roam pastures for two years before they are brought in for counting and shearing

In Peru, Chile and Bolivia there are millions of animals and are kept for the same reasons that we keep sheep - for their fleece and also their meat. There are only around 5 thousand Alpacas in France and so are relatively rare.

Why would you like to own Alpacas?

In Europe, people own Alpacas as pets, as curiosities, as effective grass cutters and for commercial reasons - breeding and fleece production.

Alpaca requirements

Alpacas are herd animals. They do not like being alone. Even if there are other types of animals around they will become unhappy, not eat, get sick and possibly die. you must have at least two but three animals would be the better but .

Alpacas eat grass. They eat 2% of their body weight each day. They also need some fibre so hay should be available to them. Nursing mothers need more nutrient intake.

Alpacas need space. A minimum area for two animals is 2500 sq metres. Stocking levels for larger pastures would be up to 10 animals per hectare (10,000 sq metres) although this would be where there is well rotated pastures with plentiful grass. We would recommend a stocking levels of six animals per hectare (almost 2.5 acres) to allow for hard winters and poor summers.

Alpacas pastures will need fencing. Alpacas will not challenge fencing but if they are hungry and here is vegetation they will walk over or push down inadequate fencing. The main reason for fencing is to keep out predators and unwanted animals (such as deer or badgers). Your fencing should be graduated stock or “non climb” steel mesh and 1.4 metres high. If you are in an areas where you my have loose dogs or wild cats, it may be advisable to run electric wire on the top of the fence.

Alpacas need shelter. You will need to provide the animals with lots of shade from harsh summer sun. This can be hedges, trees, field shelters or barns. It is not necessary to bring them in during the winter however they don't like being wet and cold for extended periods so they would benefit from covered shelter at these times.



Alpacas need supplements. Carry out a soil test to find what your pasture is deficient in. Generally, in France, the soil is deficient in selenium and it is necessary to supplement this and other deficiencies in the form of granules, oral pastes and injections.

Alpacas need water. Alpacas can go without water for days but this stresses the animal, so access to clean water is vital. They get a lot of their water intake

from grass, but if they are eating dry matter they will need extra water.

Alpacas are fussy when it comes to hay and do not like eating hay that has fallen to ground and is wet , either provide hay feeders or give hay to your Alpacas under cover.

Alpacas need clean pastures. In their normal environment they will graze and walk. Areas where they defecate are left alone and they will move on to clean areas. Not returning for many months. In an enclosed environment pastures should be cleaned daily if you are keeping the animals in the same pasture for extended periods.

Alpacas get parasites. Like most animals, Alpacas pick up parasites. They are susceptible to worms, so cleaning pastures is vital to minimise the impact of worms.

Pastures need resting. You should use a pasture for no more than six weeks, less if

there's less forage (grass, weeds, hedges etc). The pasture should be rested for six weeks to allow grass to replenish and to kill off the parasites. The ideal regime would be to move the animals to fresh pastures after a week. depending on how many animals are grazing.



Alpacas need maintenance. Toe nails grow and in rocky conditions these wear naturally. If kept on grasslands the nails will keep growing so will need cutting three or four times a year.

They will need shearing once a year. If you intend to use the fleece for processing into products or for selling on then you will need to find a shearer who is experienced in shearing Alpacas.

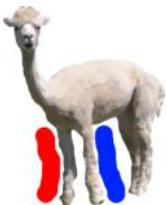
They will need medication. They need worming treatments at least three times a year, vaccination against tetanus and other infections, and vitamins to promote healthy growth.

If you intend breeding Alpacas, the mothers will need extra supplements leading up to the birth, and their babies will have their own medical regime and will need close monitoring during and after the birth.

Alpacas need good diet. Although in their natural environment Alpacas live in a feast and famine environment, this does mean that there are times of stress for them. This can lead to sickness, bad growth, poor development and below average fleece production. The correct balance of minerals, vitamins and forage is important for good conformity, fleece production and healthy babies.

Properly looked after these animals make wonderful pets, perfect lawn mowers, effective guardian animals, great show animals and rewarding investment and business opportunities.

Please contact us if you would like to know more about Alpaca ownership or visit our website for information regarding our Alpacas and visits to the farm.



Argenton Alpacas

1 Les Brissonnieres
79150 Le Breuil sous Argenton

Tel: 05 49 65 31 03
E-mail: info@argentonalpacas.eu
Web: www.argentonalpacas.eu