



# General Information for the Potential Camelid Owner

Melanie Boileau, DVM, MS, DACVIM  
Assistant Professor, Large Animal Service  
OSU Veterinary Medical Hospital

Elisabeth J. Giedt, D.V.M., M.B.A.  
Director of Continuing Education,  
Extension and Community Engagement  
Center for Veterinary Health Sciences  
Oklahoma State University

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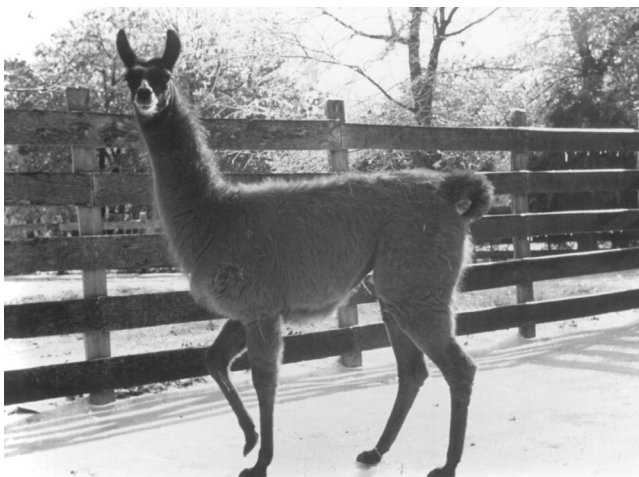
Native to the Andes Mountains, llamas and alpacas thrive at altitudes of 8,000 feet to 16,000 feet in areas of severe cold, gale force winds, and sparse and seasonable vegetation. In their native habitat, llamas are used primarily as a source of fiber, meat and labor, while alpacas are used as a fiber and food animal.

The genus *Lama* and *Vicugna* are a member of the *Camelidae* family. The *Lama* and *Vicugna* genus are comprised of four different species which are collectively known as South American camelids or New World camelids. The llama and alpaca have been domesticated longer than any other species of animal, with the possible exception of dogs.

1. Llama — *Lama glama*
2. Alpaca — *Vicugna pacos*
3. Guanaco — *Lama guanicoe*
4. Vicuña — *Vicugna vicugna*

Currently, llamas and alpacas are very popular. There are more than 164,000 animals in the U.S. They are being used in a variety of ways, ranging from:

- packing and transportation of goods
- fiber production for the textile industry
- guard animals for sheep and goat flocks
- companion animals
- breeding stock and show/competition animals



The Llama (*Llama Glama*).



Llamas and Alpacas are easy to train and work with.

Both llamas and alpacas are almost odorless, and easy to care for and are easy to train and work with, due to their generally quiet and docile nature. They graze and browse very efficiently. Growing animals, pregnant or lactating females and breeding males may be supplemented with grain or pelleted rations formulated for camelids.

The following are items of information that might be helpful to the prospective llama owner and breeder.

## Some Camelid Data

1. Llamas and alpacas are pseudo ruminants and have three stomachs (cows, sheep and goats — all true ruminants have four).
2. All four species have 37 pairs of chromosomes, will cross breed and produce reproductively viable offspring.
3. Llama males average 300 pounds to 400 pounds and females average 230 pounds to 350 pounds. Adult alpacas usually range from 100 pounds to 175 pounds. The two types of alpaca are Huacaya and Suri. Huacaya fiber is short, crimped and springy. Suri fiber is long and has pencil locks that hang down alongside the body.
4. Females are usually large enough to breed at 15 months to 18 months of age, but this is dependent upon weight. Males should not breed until they are 2 1/2 years old. Males reach full sexual maturity in 3 years.
5. Reproductive capacity ends at 15 years to 18 years old. Life span is 20 years or more.

6. Gestation is 11 ½ months (about 350 days plus or minus 14 days).
7. Camelids are induced ovulators and must be bred before they ovulate, so they do not show overt signs of behavioral estrus.
8. Camelids breed with the female in sternal recumbency, known as the “kushed” position (sitting on her legs with her belly on the ground).
9. Breeding requires about 20 minutes on average.
10. Adults are called males and females. Babies are called “crias” and females usually have only one baby at a time.
11. Llama crias commonly weigh 15 pounds to 30 pounds at birth. Alpaca crias usually weigh 8 pounds to 20 pounds at birth.
12. About 90 percent of crias are born between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.— during daylight hours.
13. Most crias are born while the female stands.
14. Crias are covered with a thin, semitransparent epidermal membrane that dries up and falls off soon after birth.
15. Females do not lick their young, but are attentive and good mothers.
16. Females may be rebred 14 days to 21 days after birth of a cria.
17. The placenta of the camelid is diffuse and resembles that of the horse.
18. The female camelid has 4 teats.
19. Crias, similar to young ruminants, are dependent on colostrum for antibody protection after they are born. They should receive 5 percent of their body weight in colostrum within the first 6 hours of birth and 10 percent within the first 12 hours to 24 hours. Lack of adequate “passive transfer” (antibodies from colostrum) can result in severe illness.



**Llamas have a split upper lip.**

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- There are tests to determine whether enough antibodies have been ingested and absorbed by the cria.
20. Goat colostrum will suffice if the dam does not have milk.
  21. Crias should be weighed as soon as they are dry and their weight checked daily for growth. Llama crias should gain ½ pound to 1 pound per day for the first two weeks, and alpaca crias should gain ¼ pound to ¼½ pound per day.
  22. Camelids are very stoic and it is difficult to tell if they are sick. Owners should monitor daily feed intake and grazing, along with rectal temperature to determine illness.
  23. Camelids require from 1.5 percent to 2 percent of their body weight of feed per day (dry matter basis).
  24. Camelids have a split, prehensile upper lip. They do not have upper incisors.
  25. Males have “fighting teeth.” There are two uppers and one lower on each side. These teeth should be cut off at the gum line at about three years of age, and again later if they grow out.
  26. “Spitting” and “body charging” are normal herd dominance behavior patterns in males. These actions rarely occur against humans and should not be allowed. Bottle fed male crias may develop unacceptable behavior (“berserk male syndrome”) when they become sexually mature.
  27. Camelids can suffer from heat stress. The heat index is the % relative humidity plus the ambient temperature in degrees F. With a heat index < 120 it is safe to handle animals. When the heat index is between 120-150, avoid unnecessary handling. When the heat index exceeds 150 handling can be dangerous and animals should be closely monitored. To prevent heat stress, animals with heavy coats should be sheared before warm weather or have a cooled living space. Shearing should occur before May 1st in southern states and before June 1st in northern states.
  28. Camelids are easy to care for, not subject to very many diseases, and have few maintenance problems short of a periodic deworming and foot trimming. They do not have hooves, rather they have two-toed feet with toenails and soft foot pads.

## Camelid Organizations

INTERNATIONAL LLAMA REGISTRY, <https://secure.lamaregistry.com/>

LLAMA ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA, <http://lanainfo.org/>  
ALPACA LLAMA SHOW ASSOCIATION, <http://www.alsashow.net/index.html>

ALPACA OWNERS & BREEDERS ASSOCIATION, <http://www.alpacainfo.com/>

## Camelid Books

*Medicine and Surgery of Camelids*, 3rd edition, 2010, edited by Murray Fowler

*Llama and Alpaca Care: Medicine, Surgery, Reproduction, Nutrition, and Herd Health*, 2013, Cebra, Anderson, Tibary, Van Saun, Johnson

*Alpaca and Llama Health Management*, Veterinary Clinics of North America, Food Animal Practice, 2009;25 (2) (552 pages), Anderson, Whitehead, guest editors

*Alpaca Field Manual*, C. Norman Evans, DVM, Third Edition, 2009