



**ANIMAL CARE AND WELL-BEING
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

LLAMA & ALPACA



Q. Do llamas and alpacas spit?

A. Llamas and alpacas might spit at each other to establish their social order, but they rarely spit at humans. This might happen if the animals were scared, threatened or uncomfortable. Like other animals, llamas and alpacas would use other behaviors to let a human know they were uncomfortable. If the person did not pay attention or understand, the animal might spit.

Q. Do llamas and alpacas bite?

A. No, llamas and alpacas do not generally bite. They have teeth only on their bottom jaw and a dental pad on the top jaw, much like cattle.

Q. What are llamas and alpacas used for?

A. Like sheep and goats, llamas and alpacas have multiple purposes. Both llamas and alpacas have fiber that can be sheared, spun and used for making clothing and other things. Alpacas are raised mostly for their fiber, but llamas have many other jobs. Llamas act as pack animals, carrying things for humans. They are also milked or raised for meat. Llamas also make excellent guard animals for flocks of sheep, goats or even alpacas.

Q. What is that noise they make? Why do they do it?

A. As with many animals, llamas and alpacas have several different sounds they make. The sound you hear most often is probably a hum, which they make when bored, tired or curious. They also make an alarm call when they feel threatened or scream when scared. A mother llama or alpaca will make clucking sounds to her infant, or *cria*. Only males make an *orgling* sound, a mating call.



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Q. How can you tell if they are sick?

A. Just as with humans, when llamas or alpacas are sick, they will eat and drink less, rest a lot more, and sometimes have a fever or other symptoms. By watching the llamas and alpacas, and knowing how they usually behave, we can tell when they are not feeling good and take appropriate action to help them get better.

Q. What is the difference between a llama and an alpaca?

A. Llamas are larger, taller and heavier than alpacas. Llamas are used mainly as pack animals, carrying things for humans, while alpacas are mainly bred to produce fiber. Llamas have banana-shaped ears, while alpacas have smaller diamond-shaped ears. The llamas' fiber is coarser than that of alpacas.

Q. Why do they all go to the bathroom in the same spot?

A. Llamas and alpacas display an interesting and unique behavior, using the same space to go to the bathroom called a *communal dung pile*. The pile is usually out of the way and far away from food. This helps to keep the rest of the area clean for resting, eating and other activities.

Q. Why are they chewing gum?

A. They're not really chewing gum, they're *chewing their cud* – or in scientific terms, *ruminating*. This is similar to what cattle, sheep and goats do. However, llamas and alpacas have only a three-chambered stomach, rather than the four-chambered stomach of *ruminant* animals such as cattle, sheep and goats. Not true ruminants, llamas and alpacas are instead *pseudoruminants*.

Q. Why do they lie down so funny?

A. That is just the way llamas and alpacas lie down. They curl their legs up underneath them when they rest or sleep. The position is called *kush*, and camels, a distant relative, do it too.

Q. Does it hurt to have their hair cut?

A. No. Just as with *shearing* sheep, cutting the fiber from llamas and alpacas does not hurt them if done properly. Llamas and alpacas are generally shorn in the spring, which helps keep them cool in the heat. Their coats grow back to keep them warm in the colder months.



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