



Alpaca Fiber

The two types of alpacas, Huacaya and Suri, produce very different fibers with different textures and characteristics.

The Huacaya (Pronounced wa-kai-ya) is a full-fleeced alpaca. Fiber grows 3-6 inches from the skin out through the whole body (legs and head included). It tends to be crimped (a zipper-like effect of the fiber), and dense.

The Suri Alpaca produces fiber that splits at the backbone and grows in dreadlocks. Its fiber grows downward five to seven inches rather than outward, and it does not have the crimp found in the Huacaya fiber.

Alpacas need to be shorn every year, usually in the spring. We usually shear in early May. Some areas have to shear much earlier due to heat and humidity. Some later. This gives the fiber time to regrow for winter warmth.

Both types of fiber are usually in the range of 14 to 35 microns. The lower the number of microns, the finer the fiber will be. Your hair is in the 60–80 micron range, so obviously, alpaca fiber is much finer.

Alpaca fiber is graded according to the location of the body that it comes from. (see the picture below). The 1st (also called a Blanket) comes from the fiber that encircles the body from the rump to the neck. It is usually used for products you wear next to your skin. The 2nd grade of fiber will come from the neck and the rump. This will normally be used for items not directly against your skin. It can be used to make rug yarn, shoe inserts, and dryer balls. The 3rd section of yarn comes from the legs and the stomach. This yarn, when used alone, is usually used for garden mulch and insulation (which we used in our barn and the store). It can also be mixed with the 2nds and made into rug yarn, shoe inserts, and so much more.

We personally very seldom use anything other than alpaca fiber for our projects. Whether knitting a scarf from yarn shorn from one of our alpacas or using the thirds around the shrubbery outside or for insulation in some of our outbuildings, we can and do use it all.

