

## **Eat it Neat!**

*by Carolyn Jinks, Benleigh Alpaca Stud*

Many visitors to Benleigh Alpaca Stud comment on the surrounds of the 'maternity paddock'. The great interest as well as the animals ~ **THE TAGASASTE HEDGE!** (pronounced "tagga-sass-tee")

At Benleigh, Allan Jinks commenced the layout plan 10 years ago, when he planted Tagasaste, more commonly known as Tree Lucerne around the perimeter of a paddock.

Two barriers of chicken wire, 60 cm apart and 1 metre high protected the young plants, with the intention of allowing the alpacas to eat the tops as they grew, thus making them more bushy. Ultimately more chicken wire was placed over the top, and the bushes grew to fill the wired cavity.

The result has developed into an alpaca-manicured "box" hedge.

Diet supplement, perfect protector from wind and sun, as well as a great double-fenced divider, which also offers a safety zone for anyone with fear of neighbouring roaming dogs.

What a bonus! During an excessively dry summer throughout Victoria, the "hedge" has been a blessing, giving green pick at all times.

Cria as young as 10 days are often seen nibbling beside their mothers on the leaves or just resting in it's shelter.

The whole concept works easily and has definitely been a worthwhile exercise many breeders may wish to add to their management scheme in the coming season.

Dr Laurie Snook, an agricultural researcher has written a book on Tagasaste, with much data regarding the nutritional benefits for both livestock and in aquaculture.

The Tagasaste, (*botanical name Chamaecytisus palmenis*) is an evergreen leguminous tree-shrub which produces masses of white flowers in early spring. Originating in the Canary Islands, and introduced to Australia in 1879, it has been planted in Australian gardens as an ornamental, on farms as a wind break and has been utilised as food value by pastoralists for many years. It is a habitat for native birds and provides winter nectar for bees.

Apart from the obvious benefits for alpacas, in other areas of our farm the Tagasaste has long been used to form edible windbreaks for stock, but the 'hedge' created with the help of the alpacas is different from mainstream farming.

Since the original 'pilot scheme', progressive plantings border many of our paddocks.

Stud males can be separated by this nutritious barrier, weanlings are secure, and all enjoy the flavour as they neatly prune leaves as they protrude through the wire.

Tagasaste grows easily in many soil types and climates, can be germinated from seed or started as seedlings. It has been recorded that livestock producers in WA are expected to plant

more than 30,000 hectares of tagasaste during the coming year and that Eastern states are following this revolution as an aid in improving landcare.

Growth is rapid, and Autumn plantings will mean that 18 months later, an effective hedge will be forming,

It is seen to have multiple benefits for most livestock, and from personal experience, we consider it excellent ~ aesthetically attractive, nutritional as well as functional, and the alpacas clearly approve as they "**Eat it Neat**".



This Tagasaste has not been grazed

Tagasaste grazed behind the fence only