

Wellington Veterinary Clinic, Inc.
(440) 647-4100
Deciding to Breed your Mare

Deciding to breed your horse may be a difficult decision. One must consider the risks and the rewards.

- Risks to consider:
 - Death of the mare and/or the foal due to complications
 - Not getting the type of foal desired
 - Extra time necessary to care for and train a new foal
 - Cost associated with breeding and foaling
- Rewards to consider:
 - Continuing a family line of good physical traits
 - Cost associated with buying a horse to meet your needs today
 - Satisfaction of foaling, bonding to and raising your own horse
 - Chance to breeding a champion

After weighing the risks and rewards, where do you start?

- Selecting a sire
 - It is important to find a sire that possesses the character traits you want for the desired price range you want to spend.
 - Determine the methods available for breeding for your chosen stallion (i.e. live cover, artificial insemination with fresh chilled or frozen semen)
 - Determine if you can meet the stallion owner's breeding requirements
 - Acquire a breeding contract to spell out the breeding arrangement
- Determine when you want your foal to be born
 - Mares are seasonally polyestrous; meaning mares may only get pregnant at certain times of the year
 - Mares start their estrous cycle as the days get longer and the temperature gets warmer. When they start to shed their hair, they are getting close to starting.
 - Mares stop cycling as the days shorten and the temperature falls
 - Normal mare's gestation is 315 – 375 days (average 345 days)
- Preparing the mare
 - Manipulate the start of your mare's heat cycle to make sure she is cycling when you want to breed her
 - We do not have the ability to "jump start" their heat cycle
 - Meeting the breeder's requirements for vaccines and tests prior to breeding
 - Specialized vaccines for the farm or state (if traveling)
 - Uterus culture, cytology and/or biopsy
 - Determine the mare's cycle (average 21 days between ovulations)
 - Knowing when your mare is receptive (in heat) makes the process easier and may reduce the cost incurred

Breeding your mare

Live cover

- Teasing your mare daily to determine receptivity to the stallion
- Allowing the stallion to breed the mare in a controlled environment, once the mare is deemed “in heat”
 - Wrap the mare’s tail, wash the vulva of the mare and penis of the stallion with mild detergent to reduce chances of contamination
 - Appropriate footing is necessary so that neither the mare nor stallion fall (i.e. arena footing or pasture)
 - It is only necessary to breed the mare once every other day
 - Excessive breeding leads to uterus contamination and infection resulting in no pregnancy
 - Do not breed more than 4 times per heat cycle; it may be necessary to have your mare examined if she is “in heat” for more than 8 days. The average is 6 days.
- Start teasing 18 days from the first breeding ‘til 18 days from the last breeding
 - If the mare is receptive, she is not pregnant; repeat the process
 - You may also ultrasound for pregnancy instead of teasing your mare
 - If the mare does not “catch” after 2 heat cycles further investigation with your veterinarian is recommended
 - If the mare is not receptive, she may be pregnant
 - Ultrasound for twins and heartbeat

Artificial insemination

- Ultrasound examination of the ovaries and uterus help to determine the appropriate time to order semen.
 - It may take a few times (every 2-4 days) if the mare’s cycle is unknown.
 - If the mare’s cycle is known, then ultrasounding 2 days after signs of heat are noted.
- Once the semen is ordered, your mare may be given a medication that facilitates ovulation. This helps to increase the likelihood of ovulating while live semen is present in the oviduct and decrease the number of times breeding is required.
- After ovulation, ultrasound the uterus to make sure the debris associated with breeding is “cleared out”
- 16 – 18 days post-ovulation, ultrasound the uterus to determine if conception has occurred.
 - If pregnant, re-ultrasounding for heartbeat and twins between 25 – 30 days post-ovulation.
 - If open, checking to see when to re-order semen for next cycle
 - If the mare is open after 2 heat cycles, further investigation is recommended.

Using frozen semen is labor intensive, requiring more ultrasound examinations. Insemination must occur within 6 – 8 hours before or after ovulation. This method is usually cost prohibitive for most on farm use.