

Preparing the Mare for Breeding

Breeding your own foal from a beloved mare can be immensely rewarding, but remember that it is a long term project requiring a lot of commitment in terms of time, energy and money.

Consider what type of horse or pony you are hoping to breed in terms of size, temperament and ability; as well as the facilities that will be required for keeping a mare and foal both in the first summer and through the winter.



Pre-breeding considerations

Most mares stop cycling in the winter months and begin cycling in spring in response to the longer day length.

Breeding an early foal can be more difficult as mares may not have started to cycle regularly. Ask your vet about methods that can be used to attempt to hasten the onset of cycling.

Make sure your mare finishes the winter in lean to good body condition. Overweight mares have reduced fertility.

Ensure the mare is fed a vitamin and mineral supplement or a complete balanced diet.

Maintain good foot care and trimming and remove hind shoes if she is going to stud.

Make sure your mare is wormed and vaccinated up to date for equine influenza and tetanus.

Natural Service or Artificial Insemination (AI)

AI can be done using chilled or frozen semen. Chilled semen can be shipped overnight from the UK and from some places in Europe. Frozen semen allows you to use a stallion from anywhere in the world and even those who have now died.

Natural service is the most economical and may be the best option if the stallion you want to use is very local to you.

Some problem mares have better fertility with AI.

The risk of injury to mare, stallion and handlers and the risk of spread of disease are reduced with AI compared to natural service.

Choosing a Stallion

- Ensure that he has a good temperament and fertility and produces quality progeny.
- Consider the size and type of foal that you want to produce.
- Find out when the stallion is available and if they offer natural service or AI.
- Make sure that you are clear on the terms of the stud fee and what will happen if your mare does not get in foal.

Pre-breeding Veterinary Examination

Ask your vet to carry out a pre-breeding examination on your mare to assess her suitability for breeding and to highlight any possible fertility issues. Finding out this information at an early stage can prevent the expense and disappointment of trying to breed from a subfertile mare. This examination is best performed in stocks or under sedation if the mare is a maiden.

The examination will usually include:

- examination of the conformation of the vulva;
- examination of the vagina and cervix using a speculum;
- ultrasound examination of the uterus and ovaries carried out internally through the rectum.

Based on this examination your vet may suggest some treatment prior to or during breeding or pregnancy to improve the chances of her successfully conceiving and carrying a foal.

Pre-breeding health tests can also be carried out at this time.

You will need to check the requirements of the individual stud or AI centre.

Pre-breeding health tests:

- clitoral swab for Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM): the culture takes at least 7 days so you need to plan ahead;
- blood test for Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA);
- other test as requested e.g. uterine swab, strangles blood test.



ULTRASOUND EXAMINATION OF THE UTERUS



SPECULUM EXAMINATION OF THE CERVIX

KEY POINTS

- Older, overweight and maiden mares are more difficult to breed from.
- Your mare should be in good general health and be up date with foot care, vaccination and worming.
- Plan ahead and find out about the stud's health test requirements.
- Ask your vet to carry out a pre-breeding examination.



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