



SHOULD I BREED MY DOG?

Before you breed your female dog, give careful consideration to the effort and expense that goes into producing a litter of healthy and active puppies. It can be both time consuming and expensive. If you own a purebred dam, you should give consideration to her overall conformation, disposition, and the good and bad qualities she will pass along to her puppies. You should also consider very carefully the choice of male you will use as stud, and look very carefully at his conformation and disposition, finding just the right compliment for your female. Ask an experienced breeder of your particular breed for suggestions. You should be familiar with the written breed standard for your breed, and be aware of any major faults that will only diminish the special qualities of your breed should they be passed on. Be sure to ask about hereditary defects in the stud's bloodline, and what the breeder has done to prevent them. You should also be aware of any hereditary defects in your own dog before breeding her.

Another factor to consider is that many purebred puppies may not be sold locally. This means advertising and the added cost and effort of finding the right sort of home in which to place them.

Despite a popular belief, the female does not need to have a litter in order to be psychologically fulfilled. In fact, a spayed female makes an outstanding house pet. She is able to devote herself exclusively to her human family.

If you decide to breed your female, it is important to wait until she is fully grown, emotionally mature, and able to adjust well to the role as brood matron. She should be kept in top physical condition, not overweight, and should have a thorough physical examination by a veterinarian before she is bred. If you own one of the larger breeds, ask your veterinarian to x-ray her pelvis after she is over two years of age. If the x-rays show bone changes of hip dysplasia, do not breed her. This crippling condition will be passed on to her puppies. Certification of hips by PENN Hip or the Orthopedic Foundation of America is desirable. She should also have a stool specimen checked for worms. A Brucellosis test (a canine venereal disease) is also advisable.

ESTRUS

As a general rule, estrus, the heat cycle, lasts 21 days, as reckoned from the first sign of vaginal bleeding. The onset of heat, called proestrus, lasts six to nine days. It is signaled by a dark bloody discharge and firm swelling of the vulva. It is during this stage that the female begins to attract the male who is able to detect chemical substances called pheromones which are discharged from her vulva and excreted in her urine. During this preovulatory phase in the heat cycle the female will not accept the male. If mating is attempted she will jump away, sit down, growl or snap at the male to drive him away.

The second phase of the estrus cycle is called estrus or standing heat. It is the time during which the female is receptive. She begins to flirt with the male, raises her tail and flags it to the side, lifts her pelvis and presents her vulva when touched in the hindquarters. The vulva softens and the discharge usually becomes more pinkish. This stage of the heat cycle lasts six to twelve days. It ends when the female refuses to stand for the male.

The heat period usually comes every six to eight months. However, some females go into heat every four months and others only once a year. Several factors, such as time of the year, hereditary tendencies and emotional states, have a bearing.



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GESTATION

Gestation is the period from conception to birth. As reckoned from the day of first successful breeding, it averages 63 days. Puppies born on the 59th or 66th day fall within the normal range. However, if the female whelps before the 57th day, the puppies may be too young to survive.

Some signs of pregnancy are weight gain, increased appetite, an enlarging abdominal girth, and sometimes morning sickness.

During the first half of her pregnancy, feed your dog her regular high quality ration of food. She should remain active, but vigorous activity should be avoided. Excessive weight gain should be avoided, and supplements and vitamins are not required. Follow your veterinarian's recommendations.

During the second half of gestation, it is advisable to switch her food to a high quality puppy food, at her normal ration. She will receive higher protein and the calcium she needs in the proper ratios.

mohnackyvet.com

CARLSBAD
2505 S. Vista Way
Carlsbad, CA 92008
760/729-3330

VISTA
971 Vale Terrace
Vista, CA 92084
760-758-8004

ESCONDIDO
2250 S. Escondido Blvd
Escondido, CA 92025
Suite 105
760/480-1934