

## Preparing to Breed Your Bitch

*By Karen Priest*

As the owner of a Stud dog, I get many emails from bitch owners, inquiring about bringing their girl for a breeding. Often, the email correspondence begins as the bitch is ready to be bred imminently. It would be far better to have these discussions BEFORE the bitch has ovulated.

I do not condone indiscriminate breeding. For purposes of this article, I will assume you have a bitch who is a nice candidate for breeding, is at least 2 years old, and has hip and elbow certifications in place.

A brood bitch should be well exercised and fit. An overweight bitch will have more trouble carrying and delivering her puppies.

If you have raised this bitch from a puppy, you should keep track of her heat cycles on a calendar. Does she cycle every 6-7 months? Or every 4? Some bitches are very regular, others are not. Often it takes a couple heats before the bitch begins to cycle predictably.

Once you have an idea when your bitch is nearing her heat cycle, you should worm her and get any necessary vaccinations. You will NOT want to vaccinate her once she is bred and pregnant.

A week or two ahead of your bitch's estimated heat, you should have a pre breeding exam done. Some folks wait until the first day of the bitch's heat. I prefer to have time to deal with any complications, and I think early planning is better.

If this is your bitch's first breeding, you will want to have your vet examine her and make certain she doesn't have any stricture, which could prevent a live cover breeding and make whelping puppies impossible.

If she has a stricture, you will need to schedule her a minor surgery to have it removed. This is usually not a difficult procedure and the bitch can be naturally bred once it is removed. Your only other option is to breed her via AI and plan a C section for her puppies.

You should also do a test for Brucellosis. No Stud owner will allow you to breed with out this test. Reproductive veterinarians will not deal with your breeding dog until you have this test. Some veterinarians can do this test in-house, with results in a half hour. The cost is roughly 60.00.

In addition to a Brucella test, I have my girls tested for mycoplasma and I usually do a vaginal culture and sensitivity. If anything comes back as an "overgrowth" on the C&S, I put the bitch on an appropriate round of antibiotics to clear it up prior to breeding. This is why it is nice to have at least 10-14 days before the breeding will take place.

So! Your bitch is healthy, has been wormed, tested for Brucella and mycoplasma, had a C&S and received any treatment necessary. Now what?

You should contact the owner of the stud dog you hope to breed to. Most stud owners will want you to email them a copy of your girl's pedigree, as well as whatever else you have: show record, breed survey, hips/elbow certifications. If your bitch is approved, you should advise the stud owner as to an estimated time of when your girl's heat will begin. This way, the stud dog owner will try not to schedule multiple bitches for the same couple days. Once your bitch is in heat, contact the stud owner again. Advise the stud owner of progesterone results as you get them.

When your bitch is very near to her heat, you might notice other dogs sniffing around her rear end, interested. Your bitch may appear to clean herself more often. You will notice drops of blood on the floor. As her heat progresses, you will notice the color of her discharge will change. Her vulva will be more swollen. She will "flag" her tail at other dogs, and become more receptive. It is a good idea to keep your bitch out of very dirty, muddy areas during her heat. As her vulva swells, it is easy for bacteria in the environment to gain entry. You also might want to use baby wipes to clean her off after she eliminates.

If you have no idea what your bitch's normal cycle is like (You have never bred her before), you should take a baseline progesterone test between day 6 and day 8. Depending where she is at, you might need to retest in 2-4 days.

Our brood bitches have been bred multiple times, and they have a usual pattern for when they are ready to breed. That said, I STILL test progesterone religiously prior to breeding. A bitch will often show signs of being ready, and males will show signs of interest in her, far earlier than she actually ovulates. Other bitches never flag or seem receptive. You NEED the science of the test result to know for certain when to breed.

Most of our girls go for a base test at day 8. This is often early. Usually, our girls show their LH surge around day 10, ovulate day 12, and their eggs are ready on day 14-16, which is when we breed. We do have one girl who is usually ready to breed on day 9 or 10 and another who is never ready until day 21! I can't stress this enough: TEST your bitch.

The nice thing about tracking the progesterone rise over multiple tests, is that you can often pinpoint EXACTLY what day the bitch had her LH surge & when she ovulated, so you know exactly when to breed her.

When you take your bitch to the stud dog, you should bring several things.

- \*A soft muzzle, in case the bitch is not cooperative. This will enable you to safely hold her, and ensures the stud dog won't be injured should she try to bite him.

- \* A tube of KY jelly. (Heat it up in your hand or pocket before using any, ice cold.)

- \* A good leash/collar that she can't slip if she panics and struggles.

- \*Copies of her test results for the stud owners records.

It is a good idea to give your bitch ample opportunity to urinate and defecate prior to breeding. Once the breeding is achieved and the tie is done, you should put your bitch in a crate to sit quietly for a little while.

Usually, you will be visiting the stud dog 2 times, possibly three times, a day apart.

Depending on your individual bitch, you might still see discharge for another week or so. (Most of our girls bleed for about 21 days. Some bleed for 28!)

30 days after you have bred your bitch, you can take her in for an ultrasound to confirm she is pregnant. Some people are able to see a bitch is pregnant at 30 days, but I generally can't tell until about 35 days, when a

pregnancy usually becomes more visible. Ultrasound will confirm viable puppies with heartbeats.  
(An xray just prior to her due date will enable you to more accurately count how many puppies you can expect on whelping night!)

*If you found this article helpful, you might also want to read our article about Caring for Your Pregnant Bitch.*