

▪ **Breeding Basics** ▪

Commentary: Have a Plan Before Breeding your Mare

By World Equine Veterinary Association • Dec 03, 2012 • Article #30942



Photo: Anne M. Eberhardt

Sandro Barbacini, DVM, of Select Breeders Services in San Daniele Po, Cremona, Italy, shares some thoughts on how to prepare for breeding a mare.

Due to the diffuse "unwanted horse" problem, it is important for owners and breeders to consider everything involved in breeding before bringing another horse into the world.

Here are some points to consider before breeding a mare:

Set a goal for the hypothetical foal. For example, do you want to produce a riding horse for yourself, a horse to sell, or a horse to add to your breeding program? Know what your goal is for the foal prior to breeding.

Know your budget. Calculate roughly how much it will cost to breed, grow, and

maintain a mare and foal. Include veterinary visits in the equation.

Choose the right stallion. Numerous factors go into choosing a stallion. Can you trailer your mare to a local stallion station or will you opt for cooled or frozen semen? Will you need to import semen from your chosen stallion from abroad? Which insemination technique will you choose, and what veterinary fees will be associated? Is that stallion the right genetic match for your mare, and does he have good fertility? Consider all aspects thoroughly before making a decision, as some factors can increase breeding costs substantially.

Consider the mare's fertility. There are many things that can affect a mare's fertility. For example, age is very important. A young, fertile mare will probably become pregnant in one or two estrus cycles and likely won't need to be treated for uterine infections or other reproductive problems. On the contrary, an older mare (i.e., more than 16 years old) has a higher potential to suffer from reproductive disorders that require medical treatment or special management. These mares might also take more cycles to get in foal, so veterinary and boarding fees will likely be higher. Before deciding to breed a mare, consult your veterinarian regarding any problems she might have and to conduct a routine breeding exam.

Know how to maintain a mare in foal. A responsible breeder should know or gather information on how to manage a pregnant mare, including proper nutrition and vaccination and deworming plans.

Don't be afraid to seek help. If an owner does not have suitable, hands-on experience but still elects to proceed with breeding after proper consideration, he or she might consider sending the mare to a farm where trained personnel can care for her before, during, and after parturition.

Breeding a mare and raising a foal can be a positive and rewarding experience. Plan ahead so you can enjoy this special journey in a responsible manner.

Seek the advice of a qualified veterinarian before proceeding with any diagnosis, treatment, or therapy.

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