



Breeding your mare

This is a bit of a minefield and there is so much on the internet it's hard to know where to start. So, we would suggest start at the beginning:

- Is your mare healthy and how old is she?
Along with people, concurrent illness in mares can markedly affect fertility, particularly endocrine diseases like PPID (Cushing's disease in old money). Also, as your mare ages the quality of her eggs will decline and the lining of her uterus will be less able to support pregnancy, but like humans the "cut-off" age varies widely between individuals.
- Which stallion do you want to use?
Use the best stallion you can – even if you think you're breeding for yourself something may change and you have to sell- use a good stallion as you're more likely to be able to sell/ produce an athletic foal.
Fresh semen by natural cover or artificial insemination (AI) does produce the highest pregnancy rates which means you'll need a nearby stallion.
If you want to use a stallion from further afield, you'll need to use AI with chilled or frozen semen. Traditionally frozen semen was said to give lower conception rates, but more recent studies suggest there isn't a lot of difference between chilled or frozen AI. Do be aware that many studies have successful pregnancy rates, per cycle, with frozen semen at around 50% with chilled semen not much better.
Shipping semen in from the EU has its challenges so be prepared for paperwork issues. Shipping semen within the UK is straightforward but beware of Easter bank holiday when it can be difficult to get a courier.
Using chilled semen is cheaper as the timing of insemination is not so crucial and therefore less scanning is required.
- What are you breeding for?
If you are keeping the foal to produce yourselves there is no rush for an early foal so breeding in April / May is ideal. The foal's gestation period is around 11 months so that will produce a foal when the spring grass is arriving, and this will encourage the mare's milk production and allow mum and baby to get out.
If you are breeding to show/sell as a foal you'll want an early season foal which means putting your mare under lights, starting in November/early December to get her hormones tricked into thinking spring is earlier. You can do this with a 200w lightbulb over a 12x12 stable keeping 16 hrs of light or by breaking up the night time with 1 hour of light.
- Is it risky to your mare?
There are risks to the foal (which increase as the mare ages) and there are of course catastrophes that happen to the mare, but this is thankfully, rare.



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www.perthequinevets.com
info@perthequinevets.com
01738 259 427

- Once she's in foal, check in with us and we can talk you through stages of pregnancy. It is important to ensure your mare is up to date with her vaccinations as this will ensure your foal is protected. The mare may also need herpes virus vaccinations if on a large yard or where there are new arrivals/young stock.
- Once your mare is close to foaling, they will need a large box with bedding that is cleaned daily (straw is best) and close monitoring for the last few weeks prior to giving birth. Mares can foal in a paddock that is clean, dry and ideally without other horses around. However, you should ensure close monitoring.
- What are signs of impending foaling?
As she prepares for foaling your mare will change shape, as her pelvic ligaments relax, and she will adopt a different stance. She may "wax up" where waxy secretions appear at her teats which can occur as early as 2 weeks before or in some cases immediately after foaling. First stage labour is the bit where the foal is positioning itself and the mare may look intermittently uncomfortable but prolonged discomfort means seeking veterinary attention. Second stage labour is when the mare's waters break, and she begins actively pushing the foal out- this is not normally longer than 30 minutes. Third stage labour is expelling the placenta which usually occurs within 2 hours - if she's still not passed it by 3 hours call for veterinary assistance. Mares are not like cows and can't tolerate retained placentas, they get sick quite quickly.

- Remember the **1,2,3** of foaling:

A healthy foal should stand within 1 hour

The foal should suck milk by 2 hours

The foal should pass meconium (first poo) by 3 hours

- If in doubt give us a call- we'd be happy to chat!