



Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.

Canine Reproduction

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Pre-Breeding Concerns

Breeding a female requires a significant commitment of both time and money. It is important to have a plan for whelping, caring for, and selling the puppies before breeding the bitch. This handout will cover the process from breeding through weaning. Our veterinarians at Clermont Animal Hospital encourage you to review all parts of the process before breeding your bitch.

When will my dog be ready for breeding?

Before breeding, the bitch should have reached a size and stage of development corresponding to the average of the breed (usually at least the second or third heat). Large breeds and breeds requiring OF A certification of the hips or elbows should not be bred until these tests can be completed at or after two years of age. It is recommended that giant breeds not be bred until they reach 2 ½ to three years of age.

What dogs should not be bred?

Under most circumstances, only registered purebred dogs should be purposefully bred. Dogs with hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, hernias (umbilical or inguinal), retained testicles (males), or any other known hereditary defect should not be bred. Dogs with hereditary or traumatic pelvic and birth canal abnormalities should not be used for breeding. Old or overweight dogs should also be excluded from breeding.

What should I do before I breed my dog?

1. Carefully consider the financial, time, and space commitments involved in breeding a dog and raising a litter of puppies. If this is your first experience breeding a dog, be sure to talk to other breeders and to one of the veterinarians at Clermont Animal Hospital so that you are well informed about the process. This handout will also provide information. Be sure to read it in its entirety.
2. All dogs should undergo a thorough physical exam before breeding. This ensures that the dog is in good health and that pregnancy will not cause an unacceptable amount of strain on the animal.
3. Because vaccinations cannot be given during pregnancy, all routine vaccinations should be given before breeding.
4. It is also important to check a fecal sample for parasites. Any parasites should be treated before pregnancy because many parasites can be passed on to the puppies while they are growing in the uterus.
5. Pelvic X-rays are recommended for all medium to large breed dogs to screen for hip dysplasia. Even if dogs are not OF A certified, it is important to evaluate the hips prior to breeding because pregnancy will put undue stress on bad hips.
6. A brucellosis test is recommended before breeding for any dog with prior sexual exposure. Because brucellosis is a sexually transmitted disease, many stud services will require this test prior to every breeding.
7. Certain breeds need to be evaluated by a veterinary ophthalmologist for hereditary blindness or have a B.E.A.R. (hearing) test performed prior to breeding to check for hereditary deafness. Be sure to ask about requirements for your particular breed.

Pregnancy

The length of gestation in the bitch is approximately 63 days but can range from 59-68 days. Pups born at less than 58 days rarely survive.

How can pregnancy be determined?

Pregnancy can be determined by two methods. Beginning at 28-33 days after breeding (depending on the size and breed of the dog as well as the number of pups), pregnancy diagnosis is possible by abdominal palpation unless the bitch is nervous, has a tense abdominal wall, or is too fat, making deep abdominal palpation impossible.

X-rays can be used for pregnancy diagnosis after day 45 when the fetal skeleton first becomes visible on films. In most cases, it is preferable to wait until after 50 days of gestation to take X-rays because X-rays taken between 45-50 days are sometimes ambiguous. If the goal of the X-rays is to determine the number of puppies and estimate the date of parturition, it is best to take the X-rays between days 56 and 58. For all X-rays, dogs should not be fed for 6-12 hours and should be walked just before the appointment so that there is no food in the stomach or stool in the colon to obscure the puppies.

What physical changes can be expected?

Mammary gland development is obvious during the fourth week in bitches bred for the first time, but milk is not present until several days to 24 hours before parturition. Abdominal enlargement is evident in the fifth week of gestation.

What diet should be provided?

The first 2/3 of gestation the bitch should be fed a maintenance or growth diet of high-quality dog food. During the last three weeks of gestation, her intake should be increased by 30% and be divided into three daily feedings. Care should be taken not to overfeed. Obesity can cause problems during parturition. Exercise is encouraged and makes for an easier parturition. After the pups are born a high-quality puppy formula food should be available to the bitch at all times because lactation (nursing) requires a lot of energy.

How do I prepare for parturition?

Females should be wormed and bathed during the last week of gestation. Dogs with long hair should be clipped over the mammary glands and vulva.

At least seven days prior to parturition the bitch should be introduced to the whelping box. Medium to large breed dogs need a box specifically designed for whelping with lateral slats to prevent the bitch from suffocating the puppies. For small breeds, a children's plastic pool may be substituted. This should be placed in a quiet, warm place; away from other dogs; and with fresh air but without drafts. Newspapers are good and inexpensive liners, but the newsprint will turn light-colored breeds gray. The ink, however, is easily washed away with a bath. After several days the box should be lined with a material that provides better footing such as indoor/outdoor carpeting.

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