

## Mating in Dogs

### General Information

Female dogs generally have two estrous (heat) cycles each year. This process begins at puberty. Small breeds may start their cycles at 5 to 6 months of age, while some giant breeds may not cycle until 2 years of age. The average age at puberty is 7 to 10 months. After 4 to 9 days of bloody vaginal discharge, the female will accept the male and stand for breeding. This receptive stage may last a few days or as long as 2 weeks. The most commonly used breeding dates are the 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> days after the first vaginal discharge. Repeated breedings, 48 hours apart, as long as the female accepts the male, produce the best conception rate.

Usually, no assistance is needed for a successful mating, especially if the dogs have had previous experience. Occasionally, however, some assistance must be given. The male may need help in mounting and entering the female or the female may need to be restrained so that she does not harm the male. A muzzle (gauze, nylon stockings, etc.) tied around the female's mouth may be helpful. If trouble is encountered, perhaps the timing is not correct. Double-check the dates and consult with your veterinarian.

Near the conclusion of a normal mating, the dogs will become "tied" together for up to 30 minutes. Occasionally, the male turns around and the dogs stand quietly, tail to tail. This is normal and no cause for alarm. If one of the dogs becomes active during this time, gentle restraint is advisable. *Do not attempt to forcefully pull the dogs apart*, as this may cause injury.

Female dogs should not be bred during the first heat period. Wait until the second or third heat to breed your female.

Because pregnancy represents a considerable strain on the mother, females should not be bred at every heat. Acceptable breeding programs include breeding every other heat or breeding during consecutive heats and skipping the third.

If a pregnancy results from the mating, the puppies are born in approximately 63 days. Begin counting from the first breeding.

If you are considering mating your dog, discuss the matter with your veterinarian. A thorough examination is recommended before breeding to help ensure that your pet is in good physical condition.