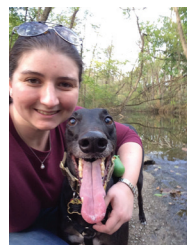


# ASK THE EXPERTS

## Broodmares

Happy New Year and welcome to a new *Equiery* column "Ask the Experts"! Periodically throughout the year we will present your questions to experts who advertise within *The Equiery* related to a variety of topics. We kick off this new feature with the subject of broodmares answering frequently asked questions related to breeding. Our *Equiery* experts this month are Dr. Sara Brunsden and Dr. Amy Burk.



Dr. Brunsden recently joined Delmarva Equine after completing a residency in theriogenology (reproduction) at New Bolton Center and is looking forward to helping expand the practice's broodmare services.

Dr. Amy Burk of the University of Maryland teaches equine reproductive management as well as other equine related classes. Dr. Burk headed UMD's Campus Farm breeding program from 2014-2019.

Please remember, these are tips and recommendations. *The Equiery* highly recommends consulting your veterinarian before breeding your mare.

### Q. Is there an ideal age (or age range) to breed a mare?

A. Mares are most fertile from 5-10 years of age. After age 15, fertility can decrease drastically. You can still have reasonable success breeding older mares; it just may take more effort. – *Dr. Sara Brunsden*

### Q. What sort of steps should be taken to prepare a mare to be bred?

A. The first step I recommend is talking with your veterinarian and making a plan. If you want a foal born earlier in the year, some management changes, such as placing the mare under lights, may be needed over the winter in order to prepare for an early breeding. If your

mare has any underlying health concerns, fall/winter is the best time to treat them before breeding season arrives.

The next step is to decide how to breed your mare. Artificial insemination using cooled shipped semen is the most common method. We can also use frozen semen, though this generally carries lower pregnancy rates. If your chosen stallion is local, fresh semen can also be used. Each method has its own pros and cons, and your veterinarian can help you choose the best method for your mare.

Once springtime arrives and your mare comes into heat, schedule an ultrasound appointment with your veterinarian to stage where she is in her cycle in preparation for breeding. – *Dr. Sara Brunsden*

Additionally, a mare may fail to conceive if she is too thin, so making sure the mare is in good flesh (i.e. not too thin, not too fat) before breeding is important.

When shipping a mare to be bred via live cover as is the case with Thoroughbreds, the mare must be up to date on her vaccinations and have a negative Coggins prior to shipping. – *Dr. Amy Burk*

### Q. Is it safe to vaccinate and de-worm a pregnant mare?

A. With certain products, yes. Mares should receive their annual boosters 3-4 weeks before breeding and again at 10 months gestation. Broodmares should also be vaccinated for Equine Herpesvirus 1 at 5, 7, and 9 months to prevent abortion. – *Dr. Sara Brunsden*

Broodmares also get dewormed two to three times during pregnancy and then either just prior to foaling or immediately after. The last deworming is important so that the foals are not exposed to parasites in the milk or the mare's feces, as feces are commonly consumed by newborn foals during their first week of life.

Foals will also require deworming on a schedule that is a little different than that of mature horses, so speak to a veterinarian to develop the best deworming plan for your broodmare and foal. – *Dr. Amy Burk*

### Q. Should the mare's feed and/or forage change during pregnancy?

A. Yes. Broodmares in good body condition (5-6 on the Henneke 1-9 scale) can be fed a well-balanced diet high in forage with a small amount of concentrate or forage balancer for about the first five months of pregnancy. So, an average 1,100 pound broodmare in early gestation may be offered a good quality pasture or ~ 20 pounds of a good quality grass hay each day. Along with that, they are typically offered ~ 4 pounds of a concentrate formulated for broodmares or ~ 1.5 pounds of a forage balancer each day.

After five months, the fetus begins to slowly increase in size and weight each day so a slight increase in the quality of forage and/or concentrate is required throughout the months of late gestation. A 1,100 pound broodmare in late gestation may be offered good quality pasture or ~ 20 lbs of a grass/alfalfa hay and 6-10 lbs of a concentrate specifically formulated for broodmares each day.

Avoid grazing mares on tall fescue pastures or hay because it may contain an endophyte that produces toxins that prevents milk production prior to foaling. Also, avoid overfeeding as too much nutrition may negatively impact the development of the foal in utero. – *Dr. Amy Burk*

### Q. Any additional supplements recommended for pregnant mares?

A. As long as the mare has access to fresh water, good quality forage, and a mineral salt block, I avoid too many extra supplements. – *Dr. Sara Brunsden*

One exception to this is that all horses, even broodmares, require daily access to a white salt (sodium chloride). Other than that, supplements should only be included in the diet to combat specific and known problems after consulting with a veterinarian or nutritionist. – *Dr. Amy Burk*

### Q. Is a foaling stall necessary?

A. A foaling stall is not necessary, but a safe, dry, and clean foaling space is important.

*continued...*

