

# BREEDING FROM YOUR BITCH



## Should I consider a litter?

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Breeding dogs is a significant responsibility that requires careful planning, dedication, and a commitment to the health and well-being of both the bitch and her puppies. This guide provides essential information for clients of our veterinary practice who are considering breeding from their bitch.

## Things to Consider Before Breeding

### 1. Long-Term Commitment

Breeding and raising a litter of puppies is a long-term commitment that can span approximately four months. This period involves continuous care, attention, and resources to ensure the health and safety of the bitch and her puppies.

### 2. Suitable Environment

A secluded, heated room is essential for the bitch and her puppies to remain in until they are 3–4 weeks old. This environment provides the necessary warmth and privacy for the bitch to nurse and care for her newborns.

### 3. Financial Considerations

Breeding involves considerable financial outlay before any return from puppy sales. Expenses may include veterinary care, health screenings, emergency procedures like caesareans, and the cost of raising the puppies until they are ready for rehoming.

### 4. Health Checks and Vaccinations

Before breeding, ensure the bitch has a recent health check and is fully vaccinated. The ideal age for breeding is between 3–5 years, though breeding can occur safely between 2–7 years, depending on the breed.

### 5. Screening for Inherited Diseases

Many breeds advocate examining all breeding stock for inherited diseases and malformations to prevent passing on conditions like hip and elbow dysplasia and various eye defects. The [Kennel Club](#) has useful resources on health screening and testing.

# The Fertile Period and Mating

## 1. Understanding the Season

Most bitches have a season every 6–10 months. Signs of coming into season include swelling of the vulva, increased licking of the genital area, and bleeding. Breeders often time the season from the day bleeding begins.

## 2. Ovulation and Mating Timing

Ovulation typically occurs 10–14 days after the start of bleeding. To pinpoint the fertile period more accurately, consider progesterone testing starting from day 7 of the season. Repeat tests every 2–3 days until optimal mating timing is identified.

## 3. Mating Process

A successful mating is usually followed by a tie, during which the expanded penis of the dog remains in the bitch's vagina. This process ensures the highest chance of conception.

# Pregnancy and Whelping Preparation

## 1. Pregnancy Diagnosis

Ultrasound scans can confirm pregnancy from four weeks. However, estimating the number of puppies is not always accurate, and lay scanners should not claim to do so. We are happy to offer ultrasound scans at Ash Tree from 4 weeks, alongside a discussion about how to best take care of your pregnant bitch.

## 2. Care of the Pregnant Bitch

\* **Diet**: Gradually increase food intake from week 6 of pregnancy, leading to an intake of approximately 50% more than the maintenance allowance at the time of whelping. Puppy food is recommended and we use Royal Canin Starter Food here.

\* **Exercise**: Continue regular exercise but avoid excessively long walks, climbs, or walks in hot weather.

\* **Worming**: Administer Panacur daily from day 40 of pregnancy until 2 days post-whelping to eliminate encysted roundworm larvae.

## 3. Whelping Preparation

Prepare a whelping box, which can be purchased or made from a cardboard box if needed. Other essentials include towels, clean newspaper, and lubricant.

### Stages of Whelping

Whelping occurs in three stages:

**Stage 1**: Restlessness, panting, and refusal to eat. This stage lasts 12–18 hours and occurs only once, even if there are multiple puppies.

**Stage 2**: Active straining and expulsion of puppies. This stage may last 10–30 minutes or up to an hour. Prolonged straining without the expulsion of a puppy may require veterinary attention.

**Stage 3**: Expulsion of the placenta, one per puppy.

If puppies don't come out breathing, clear any membranes or mucus away from their airways and gently rub them to stimulate breathing. Keep them warm and continue efforts until they breathe.

## Post Whelping Care

### 1. Maternal Care

**Nutrition**: Ensure the new mum is eating well. A good quality puppy food is recommended, and she should be fed ad-lib during lactation.

**Monitoring**: Check her mammary glands regularly for heat and swelling, which could be signs of infection.

**Discharge**: Monitor the discharge from her vulva. It should be bloody and gradually stop. Seek help if there is excessive discharge or a foul smell.

**Eclampsia Signs**: Restlessness, twitching, lack of coordination, and hypersalivation may indicate eclampsia (low calcium levels), requiring swift veterinary attention.

### 2. Puppy Care

**Feeding**: Ensure all puppies feed as soon as possible after birth to receive colostrum, which contains antibodies for disease protection.

**Weighing**: Weigh puppies daily and record weights to identify any problems early.

**Identification**: Mark puppies to identify them individually from day one.

\* **Umbilical Care**: Monitor the puppies' umbilici. Seek help if they appear swollen, red, or discharging.

\* **Weaning**: Start slowly weaning puppies onto a good quality puppy food at around 3-4 weeks of age.

\* **Worming**: Worm puppies at 2, 5, and 8 weeks of age with Panacur.

## Further Reading

The Book of the bitch JM Evans and Kay White