

Foal Heat Criteria

Like politics and religion, the controversy that surrounds foal heat breeding continues to rage. With both sides taking highly emotional positions often the real issues are forgotten during the battle of opinions. Before choosing a side in the heated debate on the question "Should a mare be bred on foal heat?" consider that the correct answer is not either "Yes" or "No" but "Maybe".

Mares are individuals and each pregnancy has its own unique conditions. There is not one right answer that works for every mare. Nor does this year's

answer carry over to next year.

Over the last forty years in the business of breeding horses, we have developed a set of guidelines to determine when a foal heat breeding is a good risk. By religiously applying these standards, foaling rates of 70%-90% from foal heat breedings can be produced.

In order to achieve this level of success, a mare must pass all of these requirements to be bred on foal heat. Failure to qualify on any one of the criteria determines that the mare is NOT a candidate for foal heat breeding.

Nature designed this fertile foal heat period for the horse. Evolutionarily it had to serve as an advantage to the species. Although 5,000 years of domestication may have created some problems with the system, proper management can turn Nature's design into the blessing it was intended to be.

— Dr. Jim and Lynda McCall

For more information, visit the McCalls at their web site: www.the-old-place.com

A MARE MUST PASS ALL OF THESE REQUIREMENTS TO BE BRED ON FOAL HEAT!

1. A mare must have a normal presentation at birth. A normal presentation is front feet first with the head on top of the front legs. The delivery must not be excessively difficult. This helps insure that there are no hematomas, lacerations or excessive bacterial infections.
2. The placenta or afterbirth must not weigh over 14 lbs after the embryonic fluids are drained from it unless the foal weighs over 120 lbs. A heavier placenta would indicate a thickened wall perhaps due to an endometritis during pregnancy.
3. The mare must expel the afterbirth voluntarily within three hours after foaling. Failure to eliminate the afterbirth within this time period provides a larger window of opportunity for a larger-than-normal bacterial infection of the reproductive tract.
4. By the time the mare reaches her nine day heat there should be no discolored discharge coming from the vulva. A discolored discharge may indicate a major uterine infection. It is normal for foaling mares to develop a mild uterine infection during the foaling process. A mare with a normal immune system should be able to clean up the infection without treatment.
5. It is essential that the mare had a normal, strong, healthy foal that nursed vigorously for the first nine days. Nursing foals stimulate the release of the hormone, oxytocin. Oxytocin triggers milk let-down and uterine contractions. Uterine contractions cause the mare's uterus to involute (shrink) and clean up quickly, preparing the uterus for another subsequent pregnancy.
6. The mare must not have a history of repeated failures to conceive on a foal heat breeding. There appears to be a group of mares that pass all the above conditions yet refuse to conceive on a foal heat breeding. These mares are not breeding problems and normally conceive on their 30 day foal heat after foaling. Perhaps these mares are a subset of the equine population which is genetically moving away from a foal heat breeding cycle.
7. The mare must be younger than 18 years of age. Older mares are a high risk for foal heat breeding. Age takes it's toll on the elasticity of the rebounding uterus. The older the mare, the longer the time for the reproductive tract to prepare a fertile environment for the next pregnancy.