



CANYON PET HOSPITAL

NORTHERN ARIZONA'S PREMIER VETERINARY HOSPITAL

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Canine Reproductive & Whelping Guide FAQ

Questions about dog breeding are among the most common we receive. We created this comprehensive Q&A guide to give you 24/7 access to reliable information throughout your dog's breeding journey.

⚠ Important Reminder: Reproductive care involves dynamic hormones—there are no exact rules. If you are ever in doubt or feel something isn't right, **call your veterinarian immediately.**

1. Getting Started: Age & Maturity

Females

- **Recommended Breeding Age:** At least **2 years old**.
- **Why Wait?**
 - She is not fully grown before 2 years, and pregnancy places heavy physical strain on her developing body.
 - Dogs do not reach emotional maturity until around 2 years of age and may lack the instincts needed to properly nurse and raise puppies.

Males

- While male dogs can technically sire a litter as young as 4 months old, most are not physically or emotionally mature enough to complete the breeding process until at least **1 year of age**.

2. Heat Cycles & Conception

Heat Cycle Breakdown

First cycles can begin between **6–12 months of age** depending on breed size (small breeds cycle earlier; giant breeds may wait over a year). Cycles typically occur every 6 months and last about **30 days**:

- **Days 1–10 (Proestrus):** Bleeding and vulvar swelling occur. She will smell attractive to males but will usually reject them.
- **Days 11–20 (Estrus):** Bleeding lightens or stops. She becomes receptive to males and usually **ovulates** during this window. (Note: Continuous bleeding throughout can happen normally).
- **Days 21–30 (Diestrus/Anestrus transition):** She remains enticing to males but is no longer receptive as the cycle winds down.

🚨 Safety Warning: There is **no guaranteed "safe time"** while a dog is in heat. Females have conceived on Day 3 and Day 28! Keep females securely indoors—males will go to extreme lengths to reach a female in heat,

and a standard backyard fence is not secure protection.

Managing Conception

- **Multiple Fathers:** Females ovulate multiple eggs over several days. A single litter can have multiple fathers if she mates with more than one male. Unintended matings mean the litter cannot be registered as purebred.
- **Sperm Longevity:** Sperm can survive in the female tract for up to **7 days**.
- **Breeding Window:** Limit breeding opportunities to a **maximum 6-day window** (3 days is optimal). Because puppies conceived days apart will develop at different rates, controlling the breeding dates minimizes the risk of losing premature "runt" puppies born before they are fully developed.

3. Pregnancy Care

Canine pregnancy lasts **58 to 63 days** (roughly 2 months) from fertilization. However, because sperm survives up to 7 days, a normal birth may occur up to 70 days after the last mating date.

How to Confirm Pregnancy

METHOD	TIMING	WHAT IT TELLS US
Blood Test	Day 32+ post-breeding	Confirms pregnancy via hormone levels.
Ultrasound	Day 28 (Large) / Day 32 (Small)	Confirms pregnancy and evaluates puppy heartbeats and overall health.
X-Rays (Radiographs)	Day 45+ post-breeding (Best right before delivery)	Essential for count. Visualizes calcified skeletons to determine exact puppy numbers and check pelvic fit

Care & Nutrition During Pregnancy

- **Diet:** Switch to a high-quality **puppy food** or increase her normal adult food by **50% starting 3 weeks before the expected due date**. Do not change her diet earlier, or she will gain unnecessary weight without pregnancy support.
- **Vitamins:** **DO NOT give pre-natal or calcium supplements during pregnancy.** Early calcium supplementation disrupts her natural body regulation and significantly increases her risk of life-threatening calcium drops after birth.
- **Exercise:** Keep up moderate exercise (leash walks) until the last 2 weeks. Avoid jumping, rough play, or ball-catching after the first month.
- **Body Changes:** Mammary development starts ~3 weeks before birth; milk can often be expressed 5–7 days prior. Vulvar tissue will appear loose and relaxed roughly a week before whelping.

Temperature & Progesterone Monitoring

Progesterone Testing: Done 4–5 days prior to the due date. Once progesterone drops, she will give birth within 24 hours.

Temperature Tracking: Take her rectal temperature **twice daily starting 10 days before the due date** at the same times each day. Normal body temperature is **100.0°F – 102.5°F**.

The Drop: Roughly 12 hours before active labor, her body temperature will drop sharply to **97°F – 98°F**. Log this daily.

4. Labor & Delivery (Whelping)

Breed-Specific Considerations

Small & Flat-Faced Breeds: Pugs, French Bulldogs, English Bulldogs, and toy breeds frequently encounter labor complications and often require C-sections. Monitor temperatures closely, as they can enter silent labor.

Large Breeds: Large litters can tire out the uterine muscles before all puppies are born. An accurate pre-whelping X-ray puppy count is crucial to ensure no puppies are left behind, which leads to fatal uterine infections.

Stages of Labor

Stage 1: Nesting & Restlessness (Up to 24 hours)

- Panting, shivering, nesting, whining, or refusal to eat. Experienced mothers may show minimal signs.

Stage 2: Active Labor

- Visible abdominal contractions and fluid discharge.
- **Escort her outside:** First-time mothers often mistake labor contractions for the urge to defecate. Always accompany her outside on a leash so a puppy isn't delivered outdoors unattended.

Stage 3: Delivery of Puppies & Placentas

- Expect **1 puppy every 1 to 2 hours**. Puppies may emerge headfirst or tailfirst (50/50 split is normal).
- **Placentas:** Sacs may emerge before, during, or after the puppy. **Immediately tear open any sac covering a puppy's nose/mouth** so it can breathe.
- **Umbilical Cords:** Let mom chew them. If she doesn't, tie off the cord tightly with sewing thread about 1 inch from the puppy's belly, then cut the cord on the far side of the knot.

● WHEN TO CALL THE VET IMMEDIATELY:

- Active, hard straining for **more than 30–60 minutes** with no puppy produced.
- More than **2 hours** elapse between puppies.
- A puppy is visibly stuck in the birth canal.
- Her temperature dropped below 98°F over 12–24 hours ago and no labor has started.
- Greenish/black discharge appears before any puppies are born.

5. Medical Policy: Scheduled C-Sections

At Canyon Pet Hospital, **we do not perform strictly calendar-scheduled C-sections** based solely on day 63 post-breeding.

Because ovulation timing varies, operating too early risks delivering underdeveloped puppies that cannot survive. We require veterinary examinations, progesterone confirmation, and active labor signs before proceeding. Our goal is the safety and survival of the mother and her litter above all else.

6. Post-Delivery & Mother Care

Caring for the New Mother

- **Feeding:** Keep food and water bowls immediately next to her whelping bed. Offer high-calorie foods (puppy food, cooked chicken, cottage cheese) if her appetite is poor.
- **Calcium Supplementation:** **NOW is the time to begin calcium supplements** under your vet's direction to support heavy lactation.
- **Sanitation Caution:** You may clean her legs and rear end, but **DO NOT wash or bathe her mammary glands** for the first 2 weeks. Newborn puppies rely entirely on scent to find milk. Altering her natural scent will confuse them.
- **Post-Partum Discharge:** Normal vaginal discharge (lochia) can persist for up to 6 weeks. It should be odorless and blood-tinged—**never yellow, bright green, or foul-smelling.**

7. Puppy Care & Red Flags

Newborn Checklist (Weeks 1–2)

- Puppies should sleep and nurse constantly. Bellies should feel full and rounded.
- **Weigh daily:** Weigh puppies twice daily at the same time. After 24 hours, weight gain should be continuous.
- **Temperature:** Avoid "pig-piles"—puppies huddling tightly together on top of one another usually indicates the whelping box is too cold.

PUPPY EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS:

- Failure to gain weight for **2 consecutive days**.
- Weight loss greater than **4% in 24 hours**.
- Continuous crying, lethargy, diarrhea, or rejection by the mother.

8. Post-Delivery Emergencies in Mom

Call us immediately if you observe any of the following critical conditions:

1. Eclampsia (Milk Fever / Low Blood Calcium)

- **When:** Up to 5 weeks post-delivery.
- **Signs:** Muscle tremors, stiff gait, restlessness, panting, weakness, and seizures.
- **Action:** **Life-threatening emergency.** Oral home supplements are insufficient once signs start—immediate IV medical care is required.

2. Mastitis (Infected Mammary Glands)

- **Signs:** Mammary glands that are hard, hot, painful, swollen, or discolored (purple/red).
- **Action:** Requires prompt antibiotic treatment to prevent systemic blood poisoning (septicemia).

3. Pyometra (Uterine Infection)

- **Signs:** Foul-smelling pelvic discharge, fever, vomiting, extreme lethargy, or refusal to eat.
- **Action:** Life-threatening; typically requires emergency surgery (spay).

9. Weaning & Rehoming

- **4 Weeks:** Introduce a shallow pan of "puppy gruel" (puppy food blended with warm water to an applesauce consistency). Do not use cow's milk or milk replacers, which cause severe diarrhea.
- **5–6 Weeks:** Fully weaned off mother's milk. Small breed puppies should remain on softened food until 3–4 months old.
- **8 Weeks: The minimum legal/safe age for rehoming.** The period between weeks 6 and 8 is critical for behavioral development and bite inhibition learned from littermates.
- **First Vet Visit:** Schedule their initial exam, parasite treatment, and first vaccinations at **8 weeks of age**.

Drying Up Mom's Milk

On full weaning day, **cut mom's food portion in half** (or hold food for 24 hours for large breeds, offering water only). This reduction signals her body to stop milk production. **Do not express or "milk" her glands**, as this stimulates continued production.

Post-Partum Coat Loss (Effluvium)

Around 2 months after whelping, mothers experience heavy hormonal shedding ("blowing coat") and may develop thin or bald patches. This is normal and non-itchy. If skin appears red, scaly, or itchy, contact us to check for skin infections.

Questions or Concerns?

Never hesitate to reach out. When it comes to the safety of your female and her puppies, no question is too small!