

Stud Dog Management

By Cathy Ochs-Cline

Almost every dog breeding program in the world keeps at least one male dog in residence for breeding purposes. Some will be popular stud dogs, some not. If a dog is offered at public stud the owner must be prepared to deal with stud dog management, keeping in-season bitches and the intricacies of successful matings. The days of putting a dog with a bitch and letting them do their own thing are long past. The practice isn't safe, usually isn't effective and is certainly not the correct way to handle a breeding.

Teaching a Puppy to be a Stud Dog

Although this may sound frivolous, you really do need to "teach" a male how to be a stud dog. Start when they are about 12-16 weeks by letting the baby run with older intact bitches. The bitches will almost always put the baby in his place. The baby needs to learn to take social signals from the bitch. When it comes time for breeding, the bitch will usually signal her readiness. If she is not ready, she may become aggressive and possibly hurt the male if he continues to try to force himself on her. By running them together when the male is young, he will be taught by the bitches what is acceptable behavior, and what is not.

Second of all, NEVER correct a young male for mounting a bitch. Either separate the two, or allow the bitch to correct the boy herself. Given the opportunity a bitch will almost always take care of herself. If she has been corrected for being aggressive (such as when she is on lead), encourage her to take action, but do not yell at the boy.

First Time Breedings

The age of first breeding for males varies from owner to owner. Males are usually physically capable of producing puppies by 8-9 months. Many owners like to wait until the male is older, more mature, and has had all his health screenings.

A younger male can sometimes present a challenge to breed because their ridiculous enthusiasm combined with a lack of concentration can make a natural breeding almost impossible. The bitches also tend to lose patience with an over-eager male who doesn't know what he is doing. In these cases, an artificial breeding might be needed to get the job done and keep the young male safe.

If you intend to have your male perform natural breedings, you will have to spend time with him in the beginning helping him perform. If natural breedings aren't important, or you wish to do only artificial breedings for health or safety reasons, you also need to work with the male to teach him how to be collected.

First time breedings are best with experienced bitches. Try to avoid maiden bitches (although sometimes this just isn't possible), aggressive bitches or bitches who have

had past reproductive problems. If you are going to attempt a natural breeding, make sure the bitch has stood for a natural breeding before, or is at least even-tempered enough to allow misbehavior from an inexperienced stud dog. If this will be an artificial breeding, make sure the bitch is properly restrained and is no danger to the stud dog.

Care of the Bitch

One of the most challenging parts of keeping a stud dog is having to take responsibility for someone else's bitch – keeping them safe, healthy, happy, and ultimately sending them home pregnant. Most of these bitches will be kept in conditions different from yours, which can cause stress and make a successful breeding more difficult. The key is to make the bitch feel at home, providing her with a happy and relaxed atmosphere and keeping stress to a minimum. Try to move her to your house as early in her season as possible.

Questions for the bitch owner:

How is the bitch kept at your house? Crated, housedog, kenneled, or a combination.

How many times a day does she eat and what does she eat?

How many times a day is she exercised? Is she walked on leash?

Is she used to children? Other dogs? Other household animals? Common household noises?

How often does she come in season?

How many times has she been bred?

How many litters has she produced?

Was she bred naturally or artificially?

Has she ever been ovulation timed? If so, please provide details.

After the bitch owner has answered all your questions, you have to determine the best way to make the bitch at home in your situation. If she is a housedog, you might have to change your living arrangements to bring her into the house, at least for a portion of the day. If she is crated, provide a crate for her that is safe and comfortable. If she is kenneled and you don't have a kennel, ask the bitch owner what they think is a reasonable alternative for her at your house. Most importantly, make sure the bitch is securely segregated from ALL intact males until you are ready to do the breeding.

When to Breed

Some experienced stud dogs will tell you when a bitch is ready. He will only mount her when he believes she is ready and he will pay close attention to her signals. The majority of the time you aren't going to be anywhere near that lucky! If the stud dog or bitch are inexperienced, YOU are going to have to determine when is the proper time for breeding.

Introduce the dog and bitch a few times before the breeding is to take place. Allow the two to interact – flirt, chase and mock-breed (if the bitch allows it). Watch the bitch's behavior, and if you need to, make notes about how she is acting with the dog. In the

beginning she will play-bow and allow him to sniff her behind. She may progress to allowing him to mount her, and eventually (hopefully) she will stand and flag. Also watch your dog's behavior. In the beginning he will chase and court her by standing on tip-toes and placing his head over her shoulders. (The males are wicked-cute when they are courting a bitch!) Soon he will want to mount her -- first in play, and then more seriously as she stands and allows him. Watch for signs of aggression from either of them. Sometimes the bitch will get cranking right before she becomes fully ready. Occasionally the dog will try to bully a bitch into submission before she is ready to stand. Separate the two and try again later.

If you want to be more precise, you may use diagnostic testing to determine the bitch's readiness to breed. Progesterone testing, LH surge testing and/or vaginal smears may be helpful. If you use these tests, put the dogs together when it is determined to be the best time for the bitch. If a natural breeding isn't possible, make sure you know the window of time for optimal breeding and get an artificial breeding done.

Semen can live in the bitch between 3-5 days, or longer. Breedings are usually performed every other day until the bitch is no longer receptive, or it is determined by testing that she is no longer fertile. It takes between 48-72 hours for a dog's body to produce more viable semen, so performing breedings more often than this is usually only for practice and does not help ensure conception.

Natural Breedings

A natural breeding performed at a time when both the bitch and dog are ready is your best chance of a successful conception. However, at least with most Cardigans, this doesn't happen often.

When a bitch is standing and flagging, or when it is determined by testing that she is ready, introduce the dog and bitch in a controlled manner (small room, or on lead). Allow the two to flirt and play for a few minutes to get them comfortable with each other. Have one person restrain the bitch in a way that she is comfortable with. I often lay the bitch across my lap, and this seems to be a comfortable position and good height for both the dog and bitch. Encourage the dog to mount and breed the bitch. Pat her on the rear quarters and tell the dog he is a "good boy" when he mounts her.

If he doesn't seem to be achieving penetration, try to adjust the bitch by lowering her rump, or raising her off the ground with telephone books or a stack of towels. If this doesn't work, try to adjust her vulva from underneath and see if you can help the stud dog make contact. Again, if this doesn't work, try manipulating the male to help him penetrate. This operation will take two people! Don't try to do it yourself. The dog's penis has a bone in it, and when you help the two dogs connect, it can often surprise and startle the bitch. It can harm the male to have a bitch flinch or jump at this time.

After the dog has penetrated the bitch, he will start long thrusts meant to help him achieve a tie. You might want to help him stay mounted on the bitch (believe it or not,

they sometimes fall off) by holding his rump up against the bitch. Try not to distract him while you are helping him. After the tie has been achieved, the dog will stop thrusting and will either remain on top of the bitch or will turn around backwards so the two are butt-to-butt. Try to make the couple as comfortable as possible. Help the dog turn around, or lay them down in their current position. Ties can last upwards to an hour with twenty minutes being average.

Artificial Insemination Breedings

Artificial breedings are relatively easy and can be done at home. Most stud dogs are easy to collect, and after learning proper insemination techniques, it is comfortable for the bitch.

If a natural breeding cannot be achieved or isn't desired, try to determine the best time to breed the bitch by the behavior indicators mentioned above or by ovulation timing. Get all your equipment together before putting the dogs together. I use a latex sheath with a test tube attached for the collection part of the breeding. Other acceptable equipment is a plastic baggie, Dixie cup or 60cc syringe cover.

Put the dog and bitch together and encourage the dog to mount the bitch and attempt to breed her. Have someone restrain the bitch. When the dog is ready a bulb will form at the base of his penis close to his body. Reach underneath and push his prepuce (sheath) back to expose his penis and hold him behind the bulb. Allow him to thrust like he would for a natural breeding. Place the semen receptacle at the bottom of his penis, or place the latex sheath over his entire penis. The ejaculation produces three fractions of fluid – the clear pre-seminal fluid, the semen, and the prostate, or post-seminal fluid. Production of semen occurs during the long thrusts towards the beginning of the collection. If using a clear receptacle you can see that the semen fraction of the ejaculation is milky-colored. It is only necessary to collect the first two fluid fractions, although it doesn't hurt to allow the third fraction to be collected and inseminated. When the collection is complete, make sure the dog's penis is totally retracted and that the prepuce isn't rolled or pinched before putting the dog away.

The insemination of the bitch is best performed with a rigid plastic pipette or a flexible plastic tube. I prefer the pipette because it doesn't bend back on itself when placed in the bitch. Use a syringe attached to the pipette or tube and draw the semen GENTLY into the syringe. Make sure you do not draw any air through the semen as this may damage the collection. After the collection is in the syringe, turn the syringe upright and draw another 5 cc's of air into the syringe. The air helps move the semen further into the bitch when performing the insemination. You may want to lubricate the pipette or tube with a small amount of KY jelly or other non-spermicidal product.

The bitch's vulva is lower than her vagina. For this reason you will want to straighten the path of the pipette or tube by placing a finger into the bitch's vagina and pulling the vulva up and into line with the vagina. Run the pipette or tube along one side of your finger and as far into the bitch as you can go. Do not force the pipette or tube to go any

further than it will as you can puncture the vagina. Raise the bitch's rear end so it is above the level of her head and slowly push the ejaculate then air into her vagina. Slowly pull the pipette or tube out and lower the bitch back into a standing position. Place a lubricated finger into her vulva and gently stroke the top or side wall of the vagina until you feel her abdomen contract. This is called feathering and it helps move the semen up and towards her cervix and simulates a natural breeding. 90 percent of forward movement of the semen is caused by the bitch. Continue feathering for about 5-7 minutes. After an artificial breeding I like to place the bitch in a quiet place and not let her outside to urinate or exercise for at least two hours.

Important Note: Most veterinarians suggest elevating the bitch during the feathering stage of the insemination. For Cardigans I do not like to place the bitch in a position that will cause her spine to be vertical for any length of time. This is for her back health, and I have personally not seen any difference in the conception rate using the standing position.

Collection for Fresh-Chilled or Frozen Semen

The collection method for fresh-chilled or frozen semen is identical to a live artificial (with both dog and bitch present) with just a couple of exceptions. First of all, a bitch may not be present and the stud may not want to perform without her. Teaching a dog to perform without a bitch is difficult and some just won't ever do it. Being able to secure a teaser bitch, or the use of an artificial pheromone is often helpful. As a last resort, the stud dog can be injected with a safe, short-acting hormone to achieve a collection.

Secondly, only the first and second fractions of the collection are used. And lastly, the dog may be asked to perform more than one collection in order to have enough semen to ship or store.

Important Note: At this time, AKC rules required all fresh-chilled or frozen collections and inseminations to be performed or witnessed by a veterinarian.

Semen Evaluations

When collecting for fresh-chilled or frozen semen a semen evaluation should always be performed. It may also be helpful to do routine evaluations on dogs who are bred exclusively using artificial insemination, or if conception rates are low. Semen is normally evaluated for one or all of the following: total number, volume, motility, speed, direction, PH, and percentage of primary and secondary semen defects. Some vets will leave the semen on a warmed slide to see how long it lives, but this is not always needed. The dog should be rated as excellent, good, fair or poor, or actual numbers should be provided. If the semen is not of good quality it may not be useful to store for frozen semen, but the use of PH buffers and semen enhancers might help boost the quality of the semen for use in fresh-chilled breedings. Check with your veterinarian to see what services they can provide in these areas.

New Strides In Using Old Stud Dogs

My old stud dog began having trouble with his prostate when he was 7 years old. This caused him to have bladder infections. In the beginning, we believed it was just chronic urinary infections, possibly from his food. But when a vet found his prostate gland enlarged and dipping down into his abdomen, we began a different treatment meant to preserve his fertility. (This was after arguing with one vet for twenty minutes about my conviction that unless his life was in danger, he was not going to be neutered.) These treatments included rounds of antibiotics combined with herbal supplements. They were successful and helped give him a couple extra years of reproductive health.

When he turned 9, the first few bitches he bred that year got pregnant and carried normal sized litters. Towards the end of the year bitches began to miss. I took him in for a semen evaluation to a local reproductive expert. His semen quality was good, but the quantity was low. The sperm was also "lazy" – moving slowly or not at all. Semen enhancing solution was added to the sperm and this seemed to help. Because of the combination of low volume and low motility, it was suggested that any bitches bred to him be either surgically inseminated or transcervically inseminated. Both methods placed the semen into the bitch's uterus giving them the best chance of getting pregnant.

In 1999 10 bitches were bred to my stud dog, who was 10 at the time. Three were mine, 7 were outside bitches. 8 were live transcervical breedings where both dog and bitch were present; and the other 2 were fresh chilled shipments and the bitches were surgically inseminated. Each bitch was also ovulation timed. 9 bitches were timed with progesterone assay tests and 1 bitch was LH surge tested. The LH surge bitch is the only one all year that missed. The litters ranged in size from 1 to 10, 7 being the average. During this year I learned a lot about ovulation timing, evaluating semen quality, semen enhancers and what the inside of a bitch's vaginal looks like!

Transcervical inseminations are fascinating. The procedure was new (it is becoming more accepted and common now) and only taught in a few places. My vet spent a week in Sweden learning how to do it. After the dog is collected the semen is evaluated for quantity and quality. The collection is then spun in a centrifuge and the semen is concentrated to between 1-2 ccs. The uterus of a bitch before pregnancy is very small and only about 1-2 cc's of semen can be inserted. After the semen is evaluated, it can be treated with semen enhancers or PH buffers.

An endoscope is placed in the bitch's vaginal so the vet can visually locate the opening of the cervix. Since the cervix in a dog is horseshoe-shaped with the opening towards the top of the vagina, locating it and threading an insemination tube through it is very complicated. The flexible tube is inserted into the endoscope and is threaded into the cervix. At this point, if the tube doesn't go into the cervix easily, ultrasound is used to visualize the shape and direction of curve of the cervix. As strange as it sounds, not one bitch was even sedated for these procedures. Some got to stand naturally on the

table, but some had to be elevated, turned, and/or twisted to get that tube into their uterus. Not one objected to be poked, prodded and eventually inseminated. I was very impressed. And the conception rate was also impressive. I'm hoping more vets become familiar with this new method of insemination, as it seems to solve a variety of conception problems.

Conclusions

Everyone has their favorite aspects of breeding and showing dogs. I find stud dog management to be my least favorite. The responsibility of keeping outside bitches, timing breedings, and then performing them can sometimes be inconvenient, and often overwhelming.

I live in a busy house where everyone has to be settled down for bed before the stud dog and bitch are comfortable enough to breed. The numbers of times I've done breedings in the witching hours of midnight to 1AM are incalculable. I've done breedings on Christmas day, Easter, on my kids' birthdays after having parties. I've done breedings in hotel rooms at specialties, in handler's trucks and friend's houses. I've bred my dogs, friends' dogs, enemies' dogs – the stories are endless. I've spent so much time at my vets getting tests and breedings done I felt like I should just set up a cot and move in. Having a popular stud dog is a big pain in the a** and a tremendous time drain.

All that being said, the reward isn't monetary, but in taking pride in my dog's progeny. Watching the breed move forward because of some of my puny efforts is well worth the time and energy I've expended. And because there are others out there who feel the same way I do, the breed will continue to grow and improve. That makes it all worth it.