

Countdown to Foaling Season

Foaling season will be here before you know it—here are some tips for getting ready.



Mare meets stallion, and you know the rest. But do you know how to prepare for the blessed event that (fingers crossed) results from that union?

Spend a few hours getting ready now, because Mother Nature doesn't always follow a schedule! That means selecting and preparing a foaling area, gathering supplies and devising an emergency plan at least a month before your mare's due date.

The first question is where your mare will foal: indoors or outdoors. There are pros and cons to each, but regardless of which you choose, you'll need to make the area both comfortable and safe.

Preparing for Indoor Foaling

A standard 12- by 12-foot stall will do in a pinch, but for foaling, bigger really is better. Consider combining two stalls by removing their common wall. This will give you more room to maneuver and decreases the likelihood of the mare stepping on her foal. Also, make sure the space is well ventilated but block any direct drafts that might chill a newborn.

- **Inspect the stall from top to bottom for safety hazards.** Remove raised nails, splinters and other protrusions from the walls and take out shelves and other potentially injurious objects. Plug any gaps in the wall boards or at the bottom of the stall doors that might trap a newborn's leg, and remove any dangling ropes, chains or cords.

- **Do a deep cleaning:** Sweep the walls, ledges

and doors free of cobwebs and anything that could harbor bacteria or mold. Strip the stall of old bedding and dig out any wet spots in the floor and fill with fresh material. Level the floor, filling any holes to give your foal an even walking surface and to prevent urine from pooling. Next, wash the stall walls (and any other solid surfaces) with detergent and water, rinse well and allow to dry before being disinfected. A solution of 2 1/2 tablespoons of Lysol in a gallon of water is recommended; apply using a rinsed-out garden sprayer, a spray bottle or a bucket and mop. Allow to dry.

- **When it's time to bed down your foaling stall, clean straw is preferred over wood shavings or sawdust, which can harbor bacteria, molds and irritants.** It's a good idea to buy and store several extra bales of straw, in case the big day comes early.

Pad hard stall floors—especially concrete—because loose bedding isn't enough. If covering floors with rubber stall mats, make sure they are clean and that their edges aren't curled or deteriorating.

- **If possible, move your mare into the foaling stall several weeks before her due date.** This will give her time to adjust and to develop protective antibodies to any germs in her environment, so she can pass these on to her foal in her colostrum (first milk). Leave adjacent stalls empty or fill them with trusted companions who will help keep your mare calm.

Preparing an Outdoor Foaling Space

In moderate climates, allowing a mare to foal outdoors is an excellent option if you have access to a suitable grassy area. It requires less preparation, and your mare will appreciate having the extra space.

- Look for a fairly level spot that's at least 25 feet by 25 feet.
- Clear the space of rocks, sticks and

other potential hazards, and enclose it with a horse-friendly temporary barrier. Grass mown to about three inches will provide a good cushion for your mare.

- Keep horses off of the designated site, moving your mare there only when foaling is imminent.

Stock Up

Though many of the supplies you'll need on foaling day are common

around the barn, it's wise to take inventory well in advance, in case you need to stock up. Gather the following items—making sure that everything is either new or clean—and store them in a lidded plastic bin:

- halter and lead rope
- plastic or stainless steel bucket
- tail bandage
- thermometer
- petroleum jelly or other lubricant
- bandage scissors
- flashlight, battery-powered lanterns or other light sources
- sterile latex or plastic gloves
- several large towels
- povidone iodine solution
- Fleet® enema for the foal
- an extra-large sweater that can be placed on the foal to keep it warm, if necessary

In addition, you'll want a watch or cell phone with a timer on foaling day.

Make an Emergency Plan

Although most foals are born without complications, it's always advisable to plan for worst-case scenarios.

Post a list of emergency phone numbers at your barn, including numbers for your veterinarian, a backup veterinarian and any friends with foaling experience.

Ask your veterinarian about collecting colostrum from your mare just before foaling and freezing it, in case none is available when the foal arrives. He or she can also advise you about emergency supplies of colostrum or local nurse-mare programs.

Finally, make sure you have access to a fueled-up truck and trailer that are mechanically sound and can be ready to go at a moment's notice. And keep that cell phone charged up!

Once you've got your foaling area set up, your supplies assembled and your emergency plan in place, review the signs of an imminent birth, and acquaint (or re-acquaint) yourself with the foaling process.

Then pat yourself on the back, knowing that you're well prepared for the arrival of that new foal. ■



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