

Principals of Successful Breeding

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There are a great many questions about pregnancy in rabbits. Some of these are: How long is a doe in heat? What is the correct way of determine pregnancy? What are some of the common causes of sterility? These and many other questions have definite answers.

The age of sexual maturity fir rabbits varies from four to twelve months of age, depending on the breed, size and strain. Small breed can be bred much earlier than the larger breed. The correct age for breeding six class rabbits appears to be seven or eight months.

The doe rabbit is not like other domestic animals which usually have only short "heat" periods during which they can successfully be mated. Rabbit does may be bred about 13 out of every 16 days. Only on the off three days of the 16 day heat cycle is the doe incapable of conception. At this time there are no ripe eggs available for fertilization. The eggs are shed 8 to 10 hours after the doe is mechanically stimulated by the mating. If double matings are to be used, they should be made within the 10-hour period in order to take advantage of the eggs which will be available for fertilization at that time.

An unwilling doe might be mated during the end of the cycle when an old crop of eggs are being absorbed and a new crop are being developed. At such time there would be no ripe eggs present to ovulate and a forced mating would be unsuccessful. By all means, examine the does sex organs before mating, they must be enlarged and dilated, if she is to be bred. If the doe is unwilling to cooperate with the buck, try her with other bucks. You must remember the mechanical action of the breeding will cause the does eggs to drop in about 10 hours. If there is no sperm in her uterus she will lose her crop of eggs.

Litter size is determined by the number of eggs shed following the mating. Many things such as inheritance, physical condition, age and nutrition influence the number of eggs shed. A very important factor in determining the litter size is the virility of the buck. If the sperm is weak or the buck is partially infertile, fewer eggs will be fertilized. In the morning, for instance, a French Lop buck will produce 6cc of semen with a sperm count of 500 million, whereas in the evening this will drop to only 1/2cc or 50 million sperm count. We believe mornings more satisfactory for breedings as we have time to double mate if necessary and we feel more litters will be born in the daytime.

If your doe is flighty and runs too much after mating, place her in a small straw-bedded carrying coop and double mate in 8-10 hours. The longest light days of the year are in the spring and early summer and this is when your buck and does are most fertile. In the fall (short light days), your rabbits are least fertile.

Physically examine the doe for pregnancy by palpation on the 14th day following the mating. Place your hands on the side of the doe immediately in front of the hind legs. Gentle pressure on the lower part of the abdomen will reveal the presence or absence of the young in the uterus. If present at this time, they should be round and about the size of a marble. For practice, use a dry doe and get the “feel” of the contents of the abdomen of a non-pregnant doe. After this, check does known to be pregnant and soon you will find that it is relatively simple to determine pregnancy.

Nest building and the pulling of fur for the nest is associated with a normal gestation period of 30 or 31 days. However, the same symptoms may be found in a false pregnancies when a doe may pull fur 18 to 21 days after breeding. It is not advisable to place a nest box in the potty corner of the doe’s hutch, and if you find that the doe soils her nest box, she is not likely to have young.

One of the common causes of sterility in does is over-fatness. Another cause for low rates of conception is molting, which often occurs during the fall months. Does in molt do not appear to have ripe eggs. Thus, they would not have any eggs to fertilize if natural mating did take place. Does that too young or too old to in solid condition will not have eggs available. Also, does that have been recently sick from infectious diseases, from parasites, or any major ailments may not have eggs and thus would not conceive. Hot weather may prevent conception by causing temporary sterility in the buck, in most cases.

The buck and doe can give the most to the young at the time of conception if they are in top physical condition.