

Breeding limits: Implications for welfare in dog breeding programs

Most dog breeding organizations and registries have guidelines on the minimum and maximum ages at which dogs should be bred. The importance of dogs as human companions continues to grow, so ensuring ethical, welfare-friendly sources of dogs is important.

WHY HAVE LIMITS?

Recommended breeding limitations consider the physical and behavioral health of breeding dogs and their offspring. Adhering to these guidelines is a hallmark of responsible breeding.

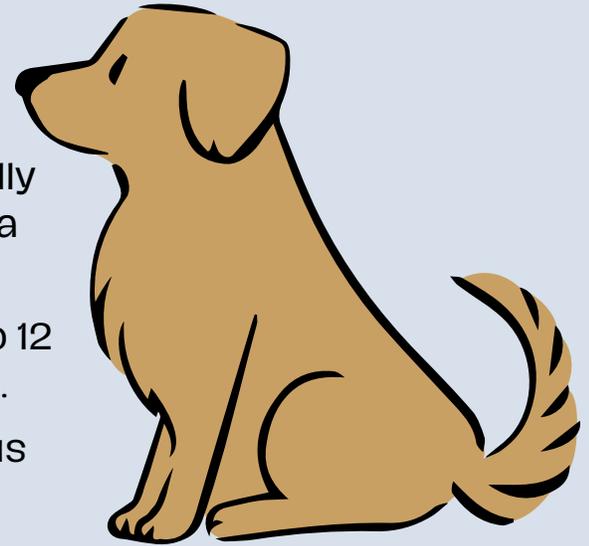
Minimum breeding ages

Dogs should not be bred before they are physically mature, which depends on the breed and size of a dog.

A small-breed dog matures at a younger age (6 to 12 months) than a large-breed dog (12 to 24 months).

Dogs should not be bred before their first estrous cycle; wait until the second or third heat cycle to breed a dog.

Dogs bred at less than a year tend to have smaller litters and puppies, and increased puppy mortality. Waiting until the dog is fully developed ensures she is physically and behaviorally ready to give birth and raise puppies.



Pre-breeding Testing



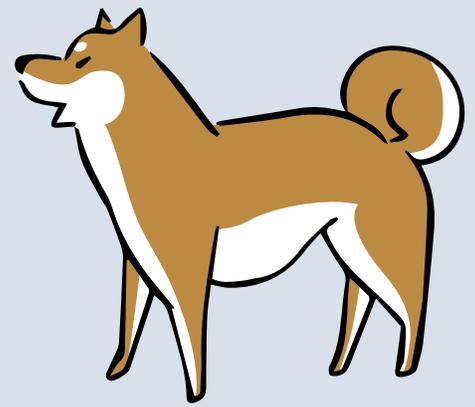
Screening for heritable conditions, such as hip dysplasia or cardiac disease, is recommended on a breed-specific basis BEFORE breeding. These tests often have age minimums. See ofa.org for more information.

Maximum breeding ages

As female dogs age, fertility decreases, resulting in smaller litter sizes and decreased puppy survival.

Older dogs are at increased risk of prolonged labor, cesarean sections, and uterine infections.

Most guidelines advise against breeding dogs older than 6 years.



Male dogs also show decreased semen quality and fertility with increasing age.

Retiring breeding dogs when they are still young also increases their chances for a good life in an adoptive home!

Breeding on back-to-back heat cycles



The Society for Theriogenology says breeding on consecutive heat cycles is acceptable if breeding dogs “maintain or regain their breed appropriate body condition and are deemed healthy on the basis of veterinarian examination prior to the onset of the next proestrus.”

Some veterinarians consider it better to breed a dog more frequently when she is young and retire her earlier, rather than breed her less often and later. More research is needed on this topic.

Total number of litters

Some studies suggest a decrease in litter size after a dog’s 2nd to 3rd litter. However, other studies have found no effects of parity (number of litters) on litter size, aside from the effects of age.

Most kennel clubs and veterinary sources recommend no more than four to six lifetime litters for a dog.

To sum...

The ultimate goal of the recommended limits is to ensure the health and welfare of dogs in breeding programs. You can further help your breeding dogs by providing:

- Good nutrition and preventative care for your dogs
- A healthy environment that meets your dogs’ behavioral needs
- A soundness exam before each breeding, including brucellosis testing