



RESPONSIBLE BREEDING:

Own Responsibly— Consider Gelding and Spaying your horse.

In today's world, in which far too many horses become at-risk each year, gelding, spaying, and hormone therapy is the responsible choice for many horses. By considering these practices, breeders and owners are “owning responsibly,” and helping to significantly reduce the number of at-risk horses in America.

Although chances are low that horses in a controlled environment will find a way to breed, gelding and spaying horses of minimal breeding quality will also prevent future owners, who may not exercise responsible control, from breeding those horses. The long life expectancy and the frequency with which horses change hands over a lifetime should make this a primary concern of every responsible horse owner.



GELDING

In gelding a horse, the veterinarian removes the testicles which produce the hormone testosterone. This is the hormone that is responsible for sperm production as well as aggressive, sometimes dangerous, behavior including fighting and mounting. Left intact, a mature stallion may become progressively more difficult to manage and train as he becomes older.

In most cases geldings are preferred over stallions for pleasure riding and for competition because they are typically calmer, easier to handle, and more tractable. It is for these reasons that a gelding is also more likely to be adopted out of a care facility.

Gelding a horse that is not an attractive commercial breeding prospect may ensure their viability in an alternate career. A stallion or colt with no commercial use as a breeding animal is an unattractive proposition for a new owner for several reasons:

- The owner faces the costs of a gelding surgery in addition to other expenses required to prepare a horse for a new career
- Stallions require specialized housing, fencing, and turnout
- Farm owners and individual horse owners have considerable legal exposure for the actions of their animals

Many prospective buyers are not equipped to house or manage a stallion and therefore may overlook an otherwise suitable horse.

SPAYING

Ovariectomy, or “spaying,” is a surgical procedure in which a veterinarian removes a mare's ovaries, rendering her incapable of reproduction. Because of the costs and risks associated with abdominal surgery, spaying is far less common than gelding and is usually reserved for medical reasons, such as ovarian tumors.

While spaying is one way to prevent pregnancy in a mare, it is also an option when, in extreme cases, behaviors associated with estrus make a mare unmanageable, unridable, or dangerous. These may include irritability, aggression, biting, kicking, persistent vocalization, back soreness, and lack of focus. Like gelding, spaying can create future career options that might have been limited by hormone-related behavior.

In less severe cases, hormone therapy may be enough to eliminate or greatly reduce undesirable behaviors. These include synthetic hormone treatments, injectable progesterone, progesterone implants, and intra-uterine devices. While various forms of hormone therapies will keep a mare out of heat, they do not completely stop her from cycling and are not, therefore, guaranteed to prevent pregnancy.

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RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP BEGINS WITH RESPONSIBLE BREEDING.

There are many things to consider before breeding a mare, and horse owners should invest a significant amount of time weighing the pros and cons of such a decision. There are both good and bad reasons to breed, and owners must honestly analyze how realistic bringing a new foal into the world is for their individual situation.

Responsible breeders carefully consider multiple factors when selecting horses for breeding. These include health, soundness, conformation, athletic ability or performance history, disposition, and pedigree. Not all horses should be bred.

The costs associated with breeding are numerous. The stud fee, which can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, is only part of the overall picture. Many of the costs associated with breeding are incurred beforehand.

Owners should pay particular attention to obtaining proper medical care for their mare. A veterinarian should conduct a thorough exam of the mare to ensure that she is physically healthy enough to possibly withstand the stress of pregnancy and motherhood. Even during an uneventful and otherwise "normal" pregnancy, the mare requires regular check ups in addition to her regular vaccination and deworming schedule.

Her feed and water intake levels will also increase over the course of the pregnancy, so owners should be prepared to absorb the increased cost of feeding and/or increased cost of boarding. In addition to the veterinary costs for the mare, many newborn foals will require specialized medical care during the first few weeks of life that may also be costly.

Owners should truthfully examine exactly why they want to breed their horse. It can be very difficult to make a profit on the sale of a foal, as the initial investment in breeding and raising it often outweighs what the animal will be worth to others. And owners should consider what they will do with an offspring if they are unable to sell it, including the training involved to be able to increase its chances of marketability in the future. Owners may even want to consider microchipping options in an effort to create a safety net for that horse in the future.

