

## Back-to-Back - Quantity or Quality

Twenty years ago, what was thought of as a distasteful and irresponsible act has now come into favor. Breeding back-to-back, the practice of breeding a bitch in two or three successive heat cycles, is considered to be healthier for the bitch's uterus. It is said that hormones produced in a normal cycle cause damage to the uterine lining and that the condition and health of the uterus is directly related to the total number of seasons the bitch has had. We are told therefore, a bitch's uterus would be healthier on her next season than it would be on the season after that or the season after that. I believe there are other factors to be considered before deciding to adopt this practice.

Perhaps the uterus is fine with back-to-back breedings. At times there may be valid or sometimes necessary reasons to breed in this manner. Under normal circumstances, however, what is the stress level on the bitch during this time period to produce good milk, raise healthy puppies and regain her own healthy appearance? A bitch isn't a puppy machine, but a treasured part of one's breeding program. If you look at your bitch when her puppies are about twelve weeks old, you will see the stress she has gone through. She has most likely lost weight, muscle tone and coat and is probably very weary of the job she has just performed for us. Shouldn't she have the traditional year to rest and recover from this assault on her body? Veterinarians who encourage the practice of back-to-back breedings need to incorporate the rest of the story with their medical opinions not just the bitch's uterus. Breeders are dependent on their advice.

Responsible hobbyists do not focus on how many puppies a bitch can make but how good her puppies will be. We should always be moving towards our ideal Labrador, trying to produce the very best we can with a goal in mind at all times. We should be breeding to keep something to go on with. There are no shortcuts. Novice breeders are often caught up in the excitement of a new hobby, buying several bitches, breeding helter-skelter and on the advice of this current trend begin producing multiple litters. Much more would be learned by purchasing a bitch, training in a few different venues with her, learning a lot along the way at shows, hunt tests and obedience trials, meeting and talking to other breeders and watching dogs that will form the direction you truly want to go. Breeding back-to-back litters hardly gives you time to focus on what you've just accomplished before you're knee deep in

newspapers and pine chips once again.

How can we possibly know if a bitch is going to be a good producer if she is in whelp again before the first litter is even 6 months old? How can we possibly know how sound the puppies are at such an early age? Where's the fun in having back-to-back litters for the bitch or the owner? The uterus might be healthy, but what about the rest of the bitch? How could she possibly get back into condition in such a short time in order to do the miracle of birth scenario all over again? Reproductionists who suggest this are thinking from a very narrow prospective when the whole dog should be considered.

So, who are back-to-back breeders ... modern day geniuses or unethical breeders? Is it better to breed a bitch in successive heat cycles regardless of the quality she produces? Should we ignore the physical appearance of a bitch after having a litter and breed her again because it's the right thing to do for her uterus? How do we know that our bitch has completely recovered internally and that her body is ready once again? If back-to-back breeding is going to be an accepted practice, I think we need to hear more from the reproduction specialists to provide breeders with the whole picture of this style of breeding, not just with a history of the life cycle of her uterus. There is more to being a breeder than that.

Serious hobby breeders need to distinguish themselves from those who just make puppies.

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