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**MARYLAND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**  
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND  
COLLEGE PARK • EASTERN SHORE

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**Q** I bought a mare at an auction this fall with the intention of maybe breeding her this spring. I had my vet come out and examine her and she's already pregnant—probably due in March, though I don't know for sure since her previous owners didn't know she was bred. I've never foaled a mare out before and was wondering what I need to look for in my mare to know if she's due to foal.

**A** What a delightful surprise—two horses for the price of one! Generally, mares do very well foaling all by themselves and won't need much, if any, help from you. Since you don't know the exact due date, there are several things you can watch for that will clue you in that your mare is getting close to foaling. However, be aware that not all mares will display these signs—and the timing and duration can also vary! Here are some clues you can look for:

Normal range of gestation in the mare is between 320 and 370 days; average is 340 days.

Udder will begin to fill approximately 4-6 weeks prior to foaling.

A softening of the muscle groups around the tail and vulva appears approximately 2 weeks prior to foaling (to test for this, lift the mare's tail—if there is no resistance, there is a softening of those muscle groups).

Teat ends may begin to "wax" 1-2 days prior to foaling. Colostrum has a thick texture and when production begins, some mares will have waxy droplets on the ends of their teats. It should be noted that I have known of some horses who never waxed and others who waxed a week prior to foaling, so it is not the best predictor of impending birth.

Consistency of the milk changes approximately 24 hours prior to birth. If you check the mare's milk every day, this is more easily measured. Milk will be yellowish and transparent up until the day before birth when it comes more "milky" and opaque in appearance. The change in appearance is due to an increase in potassium and calcium and a decrease in sodium in the milk. There are commercial tests available that will test for this change in calcium levels.

The foaling process itself should be over with fairly quickly. The first stage of labor begins with the onset of contractions and ends with the water breaking. This "nesting" period may last anywhere from a few hours to several days! A mare in stage one labor will appear restless, may look at or bite at flank (mimicking colic), and usually wants to be alone. Once the water breaks, the mare will be in stage two of labor which can last anywhere



## FEBRUARY EXTENSION HAPPENINGS

CALL THE EXTENSION OFFICE TO REGISTER

**Equine Basics.** February 28th–March 14 Mondays 6:30–8:30pm (3 sessions). Chesapeake College, Wye Mills (Talbot County 410-822-1244)

**Winter Wednesday Series.** 10:00–noon, February 9. "Let's talk hay and Pasture" with Les Vough. (Carroll County 410-386-2760)

**Quicken for Farm Applications.** February 15, Carroll County

**Pasture Workshop.** Davidsonville Family & Recreation Center, February 7, 4–8 pm (410-222-6759 or 301-970-8250, ext. 6759)

**Nutrient Management Voucher Re-certification.**

February 14, 5–9 pm, Anne Arundel County (410-222-6759 or 301-970-8250, ext. 6759)  
February 23, 10 am–noon, Carroll County

**Private Applicator Certification Training.**

February 3, 7–9 pm, Dorchester County (410-228-8800)  
February 9, 7–9 pm, Kent County (410-778-1661)  
February 24, 9–11:30 am, Baltimore County (410-666-1022)

**Private Applicator Certification Test.**

February 7, 7–9 pm, Talbot County

**Private Applicator Re-Certification.**

February 9, 7–9 pm, Kent County  
February 24, 9–11 am, Baltimore County

### Financial Management Training Workshops

As a manager of an equine business you need to keep good financial records. A comprehensive computer accounting program can help you record income and expenses, track transactions with your clientele, and generate financial statements. This makes it easier to analyze past performance and helps you make more informed production, marketing, and financial decisions for your future. QuickBooks is a low cost, but powerful computer record keeping program. The University of Maryland is conducting two-day workshops that will teach you how to use QuickBooks. These "hands-on" workshops step you through the process of setting up the business in QuickBooks using a boarding and training facility case study. Below is a list of dates and registration contact telephone numbers for the workshops. If the locations are not convenient for you, contact your county Cooperative Extension Agent and we may be able to schedule a workshop in your area.

For additional information on workshop content contact:  
Dale Johnson, 301-432-2767 x325

from 10-70 minutes, though is on average only 15–20 minutes in duration (though, when you are the one watching, it will seem like forever!). This is when the mare will lie down and have powerful contractions. Most mares **DO NOT REQUIRE ASSISTANCE** during this time (more than 90% of mares deliver unassisted). You should see a foreleg appear first, with the bottom of the foot pointing down, followed by the other foreleg and then the nose. This presentation allows for the shoulders to be more easily passed through the birth canal. If there is a presentation of the foal different than this, **CALL YOUR VET** immediately. The second stage of labor ends when the foal is completely delivered. The final stage of labor is the passing of the placenta. Once the foal is born, you can tie a knot in the placenta, but let it fall out on its own—don't pull it. Contractions will continue, stimulated by the foal nursing, and the placenta should be passed in 1-2 hours. If the placenta has **NOT** passed by 3 hours post-foaling, call your vet. Save the placenta in a clean bucket to be examined by your veterinarian. The foal should stand and nurse within an hour or so after foaling. Take notes of your mare's behavior and timing of events—it will come in useful if you breed her again because most mares stay pretty consistent between foals. Good luck with your new bundle of joy!

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