

# Breeding for a Mule

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For those of you who are interested in breeding your mare to a jack in the hopes of getting your very own baby mule from the mare of your choice, let me give you some helpful information and some experiences we have had. We don't claim to be experts but we have learned some things the hard way and why not pass some of our knowledge on.

First of all, please remember that most mares will not willingly be bred by a jack!! This seems to come as a surprise to most people. Stop and think about it. Unless the mare lives with donkeys as pasture mates, a donkey, especially an aggressive or noisy jack will likely scare the daylights out of her! This fact alone is often the most difficult obstacle to overcome in the quest for a mule foal. If your mare has never been around a jack, it will likely be imperative that she spend enough time at the breeding farm beforehand for her to be able to see, smell and hear the jack without jumping out of her skin. Some jacks are very quiet and gentlemanly but some can be very aggressive and boisterous and will terrorize a mare if allowed.

Because most mares are scared by the jack, that also means that they will not "show" to the jack like they would to a stallion, thus making detecting their heat cycles very awkward unless there is a teaser stallion available. Even so, once in full heat, most mares still will not willingly show to the jack. Thus the need for the mare to at least not be afraid of the jack even through she begrudgingly lets him mount her. Take it from me, it is not a pleasant experience on anyone's part to try and get a mare bred who's wishes do not correspond with the jack!!

Most breeders who will stand a jack to outside mares will only hand breed. This is the safest and best way to know if the mare has actually been covered. Pasture breeding may work for some but there are many risks involved if that is the route you choose to take. The jack can savage mares and if she has a foal at her side, some jacks will kill the foal. The jack can also be hurt by the mare and most breeders cannot risk having their jack injured either. Beware of the backyard breeder who will "turn your mare out with his jack" for a nominal fee and assume that his jack will breed mares. Some folks still don't realize that unless a jack has been raised with horses, not donkeys, he will not breed mares, He must be raised to think that he is a horse! Otherwise he will not cross the equine line and he will only be interested in jennets.

Now that you are armed with some information on the work it will take in breeding for a mule, you must take a look at the mare you are considering turning into a mule momma. She should be at least 3 years of age. Some 2-year-olds will catch but it really isn't fair to them, as they haven't finished growing themselves yet! The few times we have tried it and the fillies foaled, they would be barren the next year, telling us that their bodies needed some time off to grow up! Of course the other extreme would be an aged mare that's never had a foal. Her chances of carrying are not all that good but not impossible, With any mare, you should at

least have her palpated by an equine vet. A biopsy of her uterus will tell you what her chances are of conceiving and save you a lot of time and expense if she's a mare that has a low chance of carrying a foal.

In order to acquire a good mule, you must start with a good-minded mare. Long gone are the days when a mare that was hard to get along with was considered suitable to raise a mule foal. If your mare is easy going friendly, willing and eager to learn, then so will be your mule baby. Yes, a good minded jack is important but not near as critical as the mare. The baby will spend all his time with his momma and will pick up her vices and characteristics, good or bad.

Secondly will be to consider the mare's conformation. Minor flaws can often be strengthened by the jack's influence, but if the mare is unsound she can also pass along her hereditary weaknesses. Both parents should have good conformation in order to guarantee a good looking and useful mule.

Very important with any baby and we believe especially with a mule foal is to establish a human relationship from day one. Foals that are handled with kindness from day one learn to adore people and are so much easier to work with as they get older and bigger. Mules that do not trust people whether from being mishandled or mistreated are next to impossible to change. Their naturally self-preserving nature and dislike of being hurt make them very challenging animals to reclaim and may take years be turn around.

While it is important to handle your mule baby lots while he is young, you also need to teach him to respect you. Do not misinterpret love for your animal into spoiling them so that they become unsafe to handle. Baby mules do not need harsh discipline; usually a firm voice is all that is needed to correct improper behavior. They are very intelligent and easy to work with and respond so wonderfully to human handling. We get so much joy out of handling our baby mules that I find it incomprehensible that some people never touch their young foals, somehow believing that that is better for them. It is our belief that this is the most critical and opportune time in the making of a good mule. The trust they learn at this time in their early life will make them easier to teach and more reliable as a mature animal. There is much more of a bond with a mule that has been handled since birth than one that was raised without human intervention. The same level of trust is just not there. The mare you present to the breeder must be well broke to handle. She must be halter broke to lead well and must be able to stand tied without pulling back. If there is the possibility of kicking, the mare must be able to accept having breeding hobbles put on her back legs. Make sure if she is shod, that you have her shoes pulled. In other words, she must have the handling and training on her that will make her safe for the breeder and his jack and thus ensure a better chance of delivering to you that mule baby you have your heart set on. There is nothing so entertaining and delightful as a baby mule, you will be rewarded with one of the best experiences in life. Good luck to you!