

**Courtship and Mating in Dogs**  
**Daniel Estep, Ph.D. and Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D.**  
**www.AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com**  
**Copyright ABA, Inc.**

Spring is a time when many animals begin their breeding rituals. The males of many species sing songs or show elaborate visual displays to proclaim territories and/or to attract mates. What about the courtship and mating behavior of our companion animals like dogs?

Most wild animals breed only in specific seasons so that young can be born and raised when food and other resources are plentiful. Unlike their wild ancestors, the wolves, dogs can breed any time of the year and usually have two breeding seasons a year while wolves only have one.

Females have periods of sexual receptivity, or heat, that can last from seven to ten days. During this time the female is very interested in males, and may roam to find them, urinate frequently to communicate her presence and sexual status and show teasing behavior of males that are attracted to her.

If the male doesn't show enough interest in mating, the female may even mount the male to stimulate him! Clearly, females are not passive in the mating process, and even show individual preferences for some males over others. Males that are not preferred may be attacked and driven off.

Male dogs are more promiscuous than females, a trait seen in many species of animals, and less choosy about whom they mate with. Males may come from blocks or even miles away, attracted by a female's sex attractant pheromones left in her urine. Males that are attracted to females tend to forget about things like eating and sleeping and may threaten or fight with other males for access to mates.

The mating act itself is quite spectacular with the male and female becoming "stuck" together for several minutes at a time. Although some owners have become worried that something was wrong when this "tie" occurs, it is perfectly normal for dogs and may even be necessary for a successful mating. If all goes well, a litter of puppies is born about 63 days later.