

WEANING JUNIOR

Fall is the time we wean the foals. There are many reasons for doing this before cold weather, not the least is because mother is just tired of Jr. (particularly if Jr. is a stud colt). After weaning the non-lactating (non-milking) mares can be moved to pasture, where they can be maintained on grass alone. The foals can be fed some grain for conditioning, but that will be less than required by the nursing mare.

Foals can be weaned when they reach the milestones of three months of age or 300 pounds of weight, whichever is later. By this time of year the spring foals should have met both of these criteria. If the mare has been fed grain, the foal will have been eating with her since it was a couple of weeks old. Providing grain after weaning will alleviate any hunger pains the foal may experience from the lack of mother's milk. Actually, by the age of three months the foal's ability to digest milk is tapering off. This happens to coincide with the mare's decreased production. The mare's milk production peaks around eight weeks after foaling and steadily decrease thereafter. Of course the foal's nutritional needs are steadily increasing as it ages. By the time the foal is three months or older, the process of nursing just provides security and pleasure.

Prior to weaning, the foal should have been vaccinated for tetanus, sleeping sickness, strangles, rhinopneumonitis, and influenza. With the second round of vaccinations, the foal can receive its one rabies vaccination. Vaccination before weaning will help the foals with those inevitable cold symptoms so often seen after weaning. They appear as nasal discharge and coughing. While treatment may still be required, it should be shorter if the foal has been immunized.

We like the foal to be dewormed at one month of age and repeated monthly. Once on feed, they can be dewormed with the continuous dewormer.

When the big day arrives, whether it has been chosen for your convenience or with help of the almanac, the mare should be moved away, leaving the foal in familiar surroundings. The best scenario is to wean several foals at the same time. If there is one foal, a buddy should be provided. This can be one of the pasture mates the foal and its mother have been running with. The foal will now have someone to listen to its sad tale of separation.

The mare should be moved far enough away the foal cannot hear her answering its cries. If this is not possible, it may work just about as well to allow the foal and mare to be separated by only a fence. After the first 24 hours, during which the foal may try to scale any wall, just being in close company with mother is fine. Having feed available takes care of the hunger and having mother close takes care of loneliness.

The mare and foal should be separated for at least two weeks but four weeks is more realistic. The mare's udder will become tight once the foal quits nursing. Without milk being removed, the udder will start softening as the fluid is reabsorbed. Grain should be withheld from the mare beginning two weeks before weaning and continuing through two weeks after weaning. This will reduce her production, and reduce the amount of udder swelling.