

You know the result you want.

But ... **WHEN** will it happen?
Many mare owners swear by pH strips.

Predicting a mare's foaling time is a matter of

- counting days,
- checking to see if she is "bagging up",
- checking which way the wind blows,
- checking to see if she is starting to wax-up,
- trying to juggle appointments in town,
- or deciding whether to take that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity on www.cruisedeals.com.

Whatever.
Your mare will fool you **ALMOST** every time!

BUT
Many savvy mare owners now swear by milk-strip testing.

Milk Strip Tests are nothing more than swimming pool/hot tub test strips which measure water hardness, among other things.

The strange thing is that water hardness roughly equates to the calcium level in a mare's milk. As the mare gets close to foaling, the amount of calcium in her milk increases and the test strips show you that the increase is taking place.

No matter which brand of test strip you use, there is a graph that shows color changes on the strip, and what the changes mean.

You can use strips bought from breeders, or strips bought from your hardware store or hot-tub specialist. They all give a colour test chart which indicates an increase in calcium. The higher the calcium level, the nearer the mare is supposed to be to foaling.

You are watching for the test strip color to work its way to the "very hard" level, usually on the right. At the start the color will likely be at the middle or one color below. Test at the same time each day and you will see the colors slowly creep higher. Often a mare will "plateau" at the mid-level color or the one below the highest for some time. Don't get discouraged, this is normal. As your mare gets closer to foaling the strips will reflect a "jump" in the calcium level as her milk readies for the foal. Generally, when the



*Due date or surprise?
Text and photo by Linda Hazelwood.*

calcium level reaches the highest point, the mare will foal within 24 - 36 hours. Remember though, this is only a tool and can't be counted on as your only indicator the mare is ready to foal.

A further step is to use tests which include pH levels, which can be a little more accurate than just the water hardness/calcium test.

In the multi-level/multi-colour graph, the water hardness/calcium level is the top row. The pH is the around the fourth row down. This is a one dip test and the measurements for both are easy to see. Unlike the water hardness/calcium test, in the pH test you are looking for the colors to move left, towards yellow. The strips will bottom out around 6.4/6.2. Any reading below 6.8 on whatever strip you use is a sign that the mare will generally foal within 24 to 36 hours. Readings at 6.4 will indicate a foaling usually within 12-24 hours and readings 6.2 or below indicate the foaling will occur sometime within 12 hours or less.

Using a combination of the water hardness/calcium test and the pH test can be a pretty accurate predictor of when a foaling will occur. However, these tests are not 100% accurate and your mare can totally fool you if she wants.

There is no substitute for extreme vigilance, whether it's 24-hour sleep loss or sleeping in shifts as your precious cargo comes towards arrival time.

There are so many physical signs to be taken into account with these strip results, but they all add up to one fact. The mare is going to have her foal when SHE is ready and not before! 