Sows and gilts are usually bred twice, with 12 to 24 hours between inseminations. For this reason, boar studs will not ship less than two doses of semen. A dose is 80 to 100 ml and contains three to six billion sperm cells. Swine semen is usually used fresh rather than frozen. Fresh semen is packed in plastic squeeze bottles with an extender to keep sperm cells alive, and is shipped with cool packs in Styrofoam containers.

Frozen semen is available from a few boar studs. However, frozen swine semen produces smaller litters and lower conception rates than fresh semen.

Semen is generally ordered by phone, and many boar studs have a toll-free number for this purpose. Disposable insemination rods and other supplies can be ordered along with the semen.

Boar studs collect semen on Monday and Thursday and ship it for overnight delivery Tuesday through Friday. Semen is usually ordered Monday through Thursday to coincide with the shipper's delivery schedule. Some shippers will deliver semen on Saturday, for an additional fee. In areas where Saturday delivery is available, semen can also be ordered on Friday. In areas where the shipper doesn’t make Saturday deliveries, you must place your order by Thursday if you plan to breed an animal on Saturday, Sunday, or Monday.

If it is not critical that a particular boar is used, you can order semen when you notice that a sow or gilt is in heat. In this situation you can choose from whatever boars are still available or ask the boar stud to select a boar for you. Having catalogs from several boar studs improves the chances of finding a boar you like on short notice.

If it is important that a particular boar be used, semen should be ordered weeks or months in advance to ensure availability. You must predict when the sow or gilt will be in standing heat.

The swine estrus cycle ranges from 18 to 28 days but averages 21 days. By watching an animal through two estrus cycles you can predict when she should be in heat again and place your order. This
doesn’t always work, since some sows and gilts have irregular cycles. Ask about the boar stud’s
cancellation policy when you order the semen so you can cancel the order if the animal does not
cycle as expected.

Weaning is the most reliable way to predict when standing heat will occur. Healthy sows reach
standing heat 3 to 7 days after pigs are weaned, with four or five days being most common. Semen can
be ordered in advance for delivery four days after the intended weaning date. Plan weaning so that
day four occurs on Tuesday or Friday, which are normal delivery days for semen. This insures that fresh
semen will arrive on the day the sow is most likely to be in standing heat. If the semen will be collected
on Monday and arrive on Tuesday, wean the sow on the previous Friday. If the semen will be collected
on Thursday and arrive on Friday, wean the sow on the previous Monday.

Semen from a boar you specify may cost
$25 to $250 per dose. Mixed semen or semen from
a boar selected for you by the boar stud may cost $5
to $20 per dose. Overnight shipping costs $40-$50.
Most boar studs offer semen at a discount or half-
price during the low-demand months of June thru
August and December through February. Many
offer discounts on volume orders and savings on
overrun semen that is still available after a specified
time on collection day. Some give price breaks to 4-
H and FFA members.

Storing and Handling Semen

Fresh semen is best used within four days of
collection but may remain viable for a week or
more if held at 60-65 degrees Fahrenheit (16-18
degrees Celsius). Semen storage life depends upon
the boar, the extender used by the boar stud, and
storage conditions. Boar studs routinely keep semen
samples to monitor viability and can estimate the
storage life of semen from a particular boar.

For short-term storage, wrap a quilt or
sleeping bag around the Styrofoam shipping
container and place the container in a cool room in
your home. Unheated basement rooms are often
good choices for semen storage. Since sperm cells
gradually settle to the bottom of the squeeze bottles,
gently rotate the bottles two or three times a day to
keep the sperm cells suspended in the extender.
This can be done by simply turning the entire
Styrofoam box over.

If you do not have a cool room, fill several
plastic soda pop bottles with 60 to 65 degree water
and place the bottles in an insulated picnic cooler.
Do this the day before the semen arrives to allow
the temperature within the cooler to stabilize. The
more bottles in the cooler, the easier it will be to
maintain a given temperature. When the semen
arrives, place the semen bottles, a thermometer and
any cool packs shipped with the semen into the
cooler. Wrap a quilt or sleeping bag around the
cooler. Check the temperature each time you turn
the semen bottles and change the water in some of
the soda bottles as needed to maintain the proper
temperature. Since rapid temperature fluctuations
shorten semen life, do not place these new soda
bottles into direct contact with the semen bottles.

Some boar studs and insemination supply
companies sell semen storage units that resemble
small refrigerators. These have heating and cooling
elements that are thermostatically controlled to
maintain the proper storage temperature.

Some key points to remember when storing
and handling semen:

1. Do not refrigerate the semen or allow it
to become too warm. The proper storage
temperature is 60 to 65 degrees.
2. Temperature fluctuations shorten semen
life. To the extent possible, maintain a constant
storage temperature.
3. Do not expose semen to sunlight.
4. Turn the semen bottles over two or three
times a day, but do not shake the bottles.
5. If the semen is more than a week old, or
has been subjected to temperature extremes, have
its viability checked by a veterinarian before using.

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