

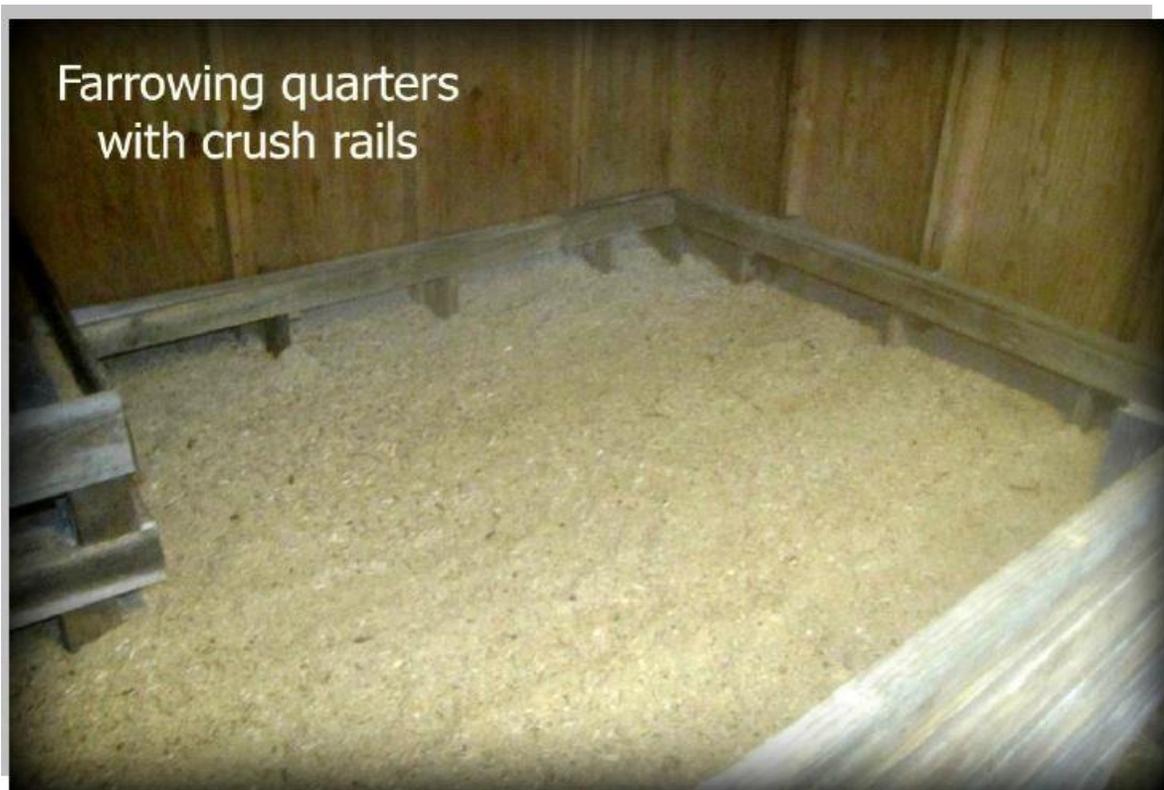
Preparing Farrowing Quarters

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Photos by Kathy Petersen

Your sow was bred almost three months ago, and her farrowing time is drawing near...what special preparations do you need to make for her and the coming piglets' accommodations?

Sows like to farrow away from their herd. If they are in the pasture with their herd when the time comes, they will find as secluded a place as possible to give birth. But if you can provide for them a safe, comfortable and familiar place to farrow, you can help avoid some of the stress-related farrowing difficulties that occasionally occur undefined particularly with first-timers. Farrowing quarters need not be elaborate. A clean, dry, well-bedded and sheltered area is all that is required. A separate pen with a shelter or hut, or a stall in your barn will do quite nicely as the "maternity ward".



Every resource on rearing pigs offers a different opinion on the use of farrowing rails. Some say they are a waste of money and effort, while others insist they are an absolute necessity. Since the leading

cause of death in newborn piglets is accidental crushing by the sow as she lies down to nurse her piglets, a single piglet saved from such a fate seems to justify considering their use. The various companies that manufacture pig housing offer farrowing rails as an option for purchase; but there are less expensive, equally effective alternatives. Four-by-four lumber, bolted horizontally to the wall, approximately six to eight inches above the floor on all the walls of the farrowing quarters, make perfect rails to give the little ones the needed escape space. Pre-made bannisters are a more attractive alternative, though they cost a bit more. Farrowing rails serve their purpose for only a few days. Many KuneKune sows make quite a ceremony of v-e-r-y slowly lying down, all the while, talking to their little ones; and the piglets learn quickly to keep clear until the sow has comfortably settled.



A dusty environment can cause respiratory problems in swine, and newborn piglets are particularly susceptible. Dust-free wood shavings are available at most farm supply stores and they make a good absorbent substratum for the farrowing stall. Soft straw or hay, also dust-free, makes excellent top bedding. Be generous with

hay or straw, as KuneKune sows seem to particularly enjoy creating elaborate nests with soft bedding.

It's horrifying to see your sweet KuneKune sow toss one of her tiny piglets across the stall because it wandered into her feed pan. It's even more horrifying to see the little one bounce off the wall and land in the water pan! You can alleviate some of your worries for the little ones through your choice of pans. Using deep pans for feed prevents the piglets from getting in and inviting mom's wrath. Rather than using a deep-water pan, however, using several shallow ones will still provide adequate water for the sow, but may also allow a tiny piglet to climb out by itself if there is no human rescue intervention nearby.

The "creeper" is an area of the farrowing stall that is off-limits to the sow. It allows you to hang a heat source for the piglets low enough to be effective but doesn't allow the sow access where hanging heat lamps present a danger for her. It also allows you to introduce the piglets to feed without interference from a constantly hungry sow. Piglets seem to like snuggling together and sleeping in the creeper, which helps to prevent crushing injuries from a sow changing position during sleep; and giving the piglets a place to sleep away from the sow also gives her a break from a demanding litter of piglets. A creeper area is simple to make. Welded panel fencing with openings large enough for piglets to slip through works well, as does a design of posts placed closely enough together to exclude the sow. Making the walls of the creeper low enough to step over makes for easy access for cleaning and admiring sleeping piglets.



The sow will be happiest if she is farrowing in quarters that are familiar to her. Housing and feeding her in the farrowing quarters for the last weeks of gestation will instill in her that these quarters are her home, and she will be quite content to farrow her litter in the snug quarters you have prepared for her.

Don't forget to use technology to capture the big event for posterity! Wireless closed circuit tv and/or webcam recording equipment is a worthwhile investment and very simple to install. They are available at any retailer that sells electronic equipment.