



# BMDCA Info Series

## FAQs About Bernese Mountain Dogs

2009 #3

**How much do Bernese puppies cost?** The price varies and is often no indication of quality. The typical range is \$1,200-\$2,000 or more both from conscientious breeders as well as from those who simply produce puppies for profit. Pet Stores may charge twice that amount. In some cases the purchase price may include the costs of spay/neuter, and hip and elbow x-rays, which will be refunded upon documented completion of these procedures. Also, please be aware that as high as the initial puppy price may be, the **true** cost of these dogs lies in the maintenance costs, which typically run \$60-100/month, with healthy dogs at the lower end of this range. **Red flags:** Sellers who price female puppies higher than male puppies and sellers who charge extra for a "lifetime guarantee" may be suspect.

**Why do they cost so much?** There are a variety of expenses incurred by conscientious breeders who are committed to enhancing the integrity and quality of the breed.

1) Health screenings for hereditary diseases cost \$400-\$800 per animal. If either the stud dog or bitch does not undergo these tests, it will not be used in a responsible breeder's breeding program. **Red flags:** Sellers who breed or broker dogs without completing the recommended and common-practice health screenings and/or who breed dogs who do not have satisfactory health clearances should be avoided.

2) Stud fees for quality males and costs for transportation of the female for breeding often run \$1000 or more. And, many breedings do not result in a litter.

3) Reproductive complications are common in this breed. Bitches may require C-sections costing \$400-\$1000. Litters may be small due to low conception rate or newborn mortality.

4) Conscientious breeders show their dogs at AKC-sanctioned shows to learn about the breed, assess how their own dogs compare to others, and scout out new bloodlines to combine with their own. Showing is a very expensive pursuit.

**Where can I get a puppy?** Bernese Mountain Dog puppies can be obtained from a variety of sources. As the breed has gained popularity, it has attracted the attention of people seeking to profit from the high demand. Your best chance of getting a puppy that will mature into a healthy dog lies with a conscientious breeder who is active in learning about the breed and continually improving his or her lines of dogs. To find

such a breeder your search should employ a variety of tactics. Contact the BMDCA and regional BMD clubs for breeder contact information. Locate Berner owners and engage them in discussions. Attend dog shows and events



and talk with Berner people there. Tap as many good sources as you can. You will learn a lot about the breed and the vast array of people involved in it – good and bad.

**How long will it take to get a puppy?** The true answer to that question is – it depends on availability, demand and how discriminating a buyer you are. Waiting for a puppy from a conscientious breeder whose bloodlines are particularly appealing to you might take many months and even a year or more. Be patient. A quality puppy is worth the wait. **Red flags:** Buyer beware! No matter how caring they may seem while making the sale, some sellers attempt to use Bernese Mountain Dogs as moneymaking machines. **Buy from a conscientious breeder.** Do your homework. Ask good questions and require that you be provided with a copy of the multi-generation pedigree, health certifications and written contract before you buy the puppy. Talk to others who have purchased puppies from the seller. Make sure the seller is committed to the welfare of his/her own dogs and the breed.

**What kind of guarantee should I get?** You should get a guarantee that is meaningful to **you**. It should be a guarantee that is of **value**. Most guarantees that offer a little money back if the dog has a crippling hereditary defect will barely cover the cost of diagnosis, much less the treatment. Other guarantees may offer a discount on another puppy from the same seller (and if from similar lines, the same health risks may exist). In the long run, proof of the dog's family history of health, provided by a knowledgeable and conscientious breeder, may be of greater value.

**What do Berners look like? How big are they?**

The Bernese Mountain Dog is a large, striking, tri-colored, long-haired dog. They are sturdy dogs. Measured at the withers, dogs are 25 to 27 ½ inches; bitches are 23 to 26 inches. In terms of weight, dogs and bitches generally range from 80-120 and 70-100 pounds, respectively – but be aware that even though this is a wide range some Bernese still fall outside it.

**Do Bernese drool?** The breed should be dry mouthed, but not all Berners are. It seems that pendulous lips tend toward sloppier mouths and drooling. Look at the parents as well as the puppies to get an idea whether the pup you are considering has close-fitting or loose, floppy lips.

**Do they shed a lot?** Yes! For allergy-prone people, this may not be the ideal breed. For those keeping a meticulous house, daily sweeping or vacuuming may be necessary during much of the year. And yes, you may find hair in your food!

**Are Bernese easy to train? Are they smart?**

Bernese generally like to please their people if they respect them. Some dogs are challenging and it takes more work to develop their desire to please. Bernese are smart enough to

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manipulate their owners. Generally, most Bernese are very sensitive, impressionable dogs. Some may be “soft”. Bad or scary experiences are hard to overcome and are best anticipated and avoided. Only positive training techniques should be used. These dogs have lots of heart, and their owners need to understand their dogs’ unique, psychological make-up.

**What is their temperament like?** With the training essential for ownership of a large working breed, adult Berners are generally gentle, easygoing and tolerant. They are not prone to excessive barking unless left unattended for too long. They do not do well when isolated from people or activity. This breed can be slow to mature, and young dogs can be very active compared to the trained, often mellow adult. While Berners should not be shy, this tendency does run in the breed. Due to temperament concerns it is very important to expose Bernese to a wide variety of people, places and other animals, especially in their first year of life.

**Are Bernese good with children?** This depends on the individuals involved – the child, the dog, and perhaps most importantly, the parents. The Bernese is NOT a “no-brainer” choice of breed for a family with small children. Many Berner puppies go through a “mouthy” stage that can be unwittingly encouraged by young children. Many Berners’ bodies grow faster than their “brains,” which can be a challenge to the inexperienced dog owner.

**How are they with other animals?** Most Bernese puppies will be able to adjust to the other members of their new families – human, canine, feline and other pets. The greater the size difference, the more supervision and training may be required. Also, much depends on the individuals involved. Some Berners are more nurturing, while others may have a stronger prey drive. The majority are somewhere in the middle and will respond to guidance in regard to their interactions with other family members.

**Is their lifespan really only 7 years?** Yes, the average lifespan of the Bernese is less than 8 years. Some live beyond ten years and some live only a short time. Why? The most common cause of premature (prior to 7 years) death is cancer. Selective breeding for physical and character traits unique to the BMD over the past hundred years may have contributed inadvertently to the breed’s genetic predisposition to develop health problems. To reverse this trend, it is critical that breeders now collect health information on whole families of dogs, share that information through our open databases, and use that information to make wise breeding decisions to improve health and longevity.

**Are there any common health issues?** As with most purebreds, Bernese are affected by a variety of genetic diseases and other health issues. These include cancer, hip and elbow dysplasia, other orthopedic problems, eye diseases, cardiac disease, allergies, hypothyroidism, autoimmune diseases, von Willebrand’s Disease (a blood clotting disorder), bloat and more. It is important to work with a breeder who is knowledgeable about the health risks in his or her line of dogs, and will share this knowledge with you so you can decide what risks are acceptable to you. (For more information read **Info Series #4 – Health Issues in BMDs** and visit our website.)

**What type of care does this breed require?** Most importantly, your Berner wants to be a member of your family. **This breed demands attention.** This takes time and

effort on your part. There are more independent breeds if this does not sound like a commitment for which you are ready.

- In order to become a well-behaved member of the family and society, **training** is critical – preferably via organized training classes attended by others. A puppy socialization class should be followed by a basic obedience course, all taught using positive motivation and reinforcement.
- In terms of **food**, this breed requires a high quality diet. The amount of food consumption varies. Some eat surprisingly little for a dog their size, while others require more than the recommended ration. On average, while stressing that every individual is different, an adult Bernese will require about 4 cups of a premium dog food daily.
- In addition to routine **veterinary care**, every Bernese should be screened for hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, and eye disease at a minimum. This screening is critical to the future health of the breed. Also, sadly, many Bernese owners incur high veterinary bills to cope with the large number of genetic and non-genetic diseases affecting this breed.
- In terms of **shelter**, Berners prefer to be with their people, so access to the house is important. A fenced yard for “at will” exercise is required by some breeders, but considered a bonus by others. This breed does NOT do well in hot and humid climates. Shade is essential, with access to an air-conditioned environment preferred during extreme heat.
- With respect to **grooming**, the BMD is a double-coated breed, and shedding is considerable. A Berner’s coat is relatively easy to maintain. A periodic bath and frequent brushing will maintain a neat appearance.
- **Exercise** requirements are another thing to consider when deciding if this is the breed for you. A minimum of 30 minutes of moderately vigorous exercise daily plus several trips outside daily are adequate for some Bernese. While there is considerable variation in the needs and dispositions of Berners, some may require considerably more than this minimum amount of exercise to remain both a fit and pleasant companion.

**Where did the Bernese Mountain Dog come from? What is its background?** Named for the Canton of Bern, the BMD was developed as a working dog with origins in the farm areas of Switzerland. Historically, Berners were used as general purpose farm dogs; their large, hardy frames and their calm-natured, people-oriented temperaments made them ideal for driving cattle, pulling carts to market, watching the farm and being farmers’ companions.

**What kinds of activities can you do with a Bernese?** Bernese are a highly versatile breed. Dogs and their human companions enjoy competing in conformation, obedience, agility, tracking, herding and carting. Berners also make wonderful therapy dogs, bringing cheer to others. Individual dogs will be serviceable for these various activities depending on their aptitude, structure, temperament and character. Not every Berner will perform well in every event.

