



BMDCA Info Series

Bernese Mountain Dogs & Grooming/Hygiene

2023 #13

Introduction ► Grooming your Berner provides aesthetic and health benefits for the dog as well as gives both owner and dog a good chance to spend quality time appreciating each other's company. Teaching a puppy how to accept all aspects of grooming is an essential part of early training.

There are as many views on grooming as there are groomers. Approaches to grooming vary widely from "wash, towel, and go" to more elaborate routines. Pick and choose from the thoughts offered here and seek suggestions from others, especially your dog's breeder. Keep in mind that grooming requires patience, gentle hands, and a lot of praise. Treats are great as positive reinforcement. Regardless of the routine you adopt, grooming is a rewarding activity for you and your dog.

The Standard of the Bernese Mountain Dog ►

The AKC Breed Standard states that "the Bernese Mountain Dog is shown in natural coat and undue trimming is to be discouraged." Outside of possibly trimming the feet and ears to give them a neat appearance, no trimming is needed.

What Grooming Entails ► A basic grooming routine should provide care for ears, nails, coat, and teeth.

Ears: Periodic ear cleaning is very important to prevent infection and fungus growth. It is also important not to get water in the ear canal as moisture quickly can lead to problems. There are many good products available from your vet or pet supply stores for use in ear cleaning. Be sure to follow the directions.

Nails: Regardless of whether a dog is shown in conformation, competes in a working activity, or is a companion, its nails should be kept short. Human nail clippers work well on young puppies. As the dog grows, canine nail clippers will be needed or an electric grinder (such as a Dremel drill with stone attachment) can be used. Many vets and groomers are glad to demonstrate how to trim nails for it makes their jobs easier in handling the dog when the owner trims nails routinely and properly. Some dogs' nails grow very quickly while others don't. Also, some dogs wear their nails down via daily activity and don't require nail trimming at all.

Near the base and inside the dog's nail is tender, pink tissue called the quick. The quick is visible inside white nails but not inside black ones. A longer nail will have a longer quick. Try to avoid cutting the quick as it is painful and results in bleeding. As nails are shortened with regular clipping the quick will recede.

If a dog's quick is accidentally cut when clipping nails, the resulting bleeding can usually be stopped by applying styptic powder or drawing the dog's nail across a bar of softened soap. One of the advantages of grinding nails is that the process automatically cauterizes the quick should you grind too far. However, a grinder is noisy and care should be taken when introducing it to a dog. As with all aspects of grooming, the

regular handling of feet for nail trimming should be introduced slowly and when your Berner is still a puppy.

Coat: To keep your dog's coat healthy, it must be kept clean and brushed – weekly brushing is recommended. Frequency of bathing depends on how quickly your dog gets dirty or has that "doggy" odor. Excessive bathing can cause as many problems as insufficient bathing. Bernese require less grooming than many other coated breeds as Berner coats easily shed dirt, especially with the help of a little brushing. **DO NOT shave your dog!**

There are many types of soap and shampoo – plain, with conditioners, with insecticides, all natural, etc. Consult your dog's breeder for recommendations. Try to use a shampoo formulated for dogs. Read the directions and cautions carefully. Not all products are suitable for puppies.

People bathe dogs in a variety of places – special dog tubs, outside with the hose in good weather, at pet facilities with self-serve bathing areas, or in the family bathtub with a hand-held showerhead to direct the water. Small puppies can be bathed in a sink, taking extra care not to let them get chilled. Make bathing fun so the dog will find it enjoyable.

When bathing your dog be careful not to get soap in the eyes and ears. Placing a cotton ball in each ear before bathing will help. Be thorough in rinsing out the shampoo or the residue might irritate the skin, causing hot spots (oozy and irritating sores on the skin). Recurring skin problems should be discussed with your vet.

For drying, some owners use a high-velocity, forced-air dog dryer that literally blows the water out of the coat. Exercise caution with human hair dryers as they are much hotter and could burn your dog's skin. Some let the dog "air dry" after toweling. Seasons and weather conditions can affect your choice. Some living in warm, humid conditions prefer the blower for it greatly speeds up the process and some dogs are prone to hot spots if their coats are damp for extended periods.

Many dogs are very afraid of the noise and sensation of a high-velocity dryer, especially when first introduced. Start slowly, on the low speed, always being sure to have the dog under control. Never force the situation. If the puppy or dog is fearful, take things gradually, and introduce the blower over time. Reduce the intensity of the airflow by turning down the motor speed or extending the distance between the blower and the dog. Use a lot of praise and treats.

Take great care in introducing all grooming aids, the grooming table, dryer, and implements. Always keep the dog's safety as the number one priority. All dogs, but puppies and older dogs especially, need frequent breaks and should be allowed to sit or lie down when tired.

Common grooming tools used by Berner owners include the

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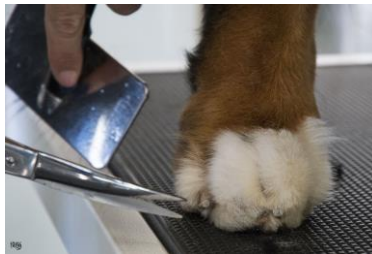
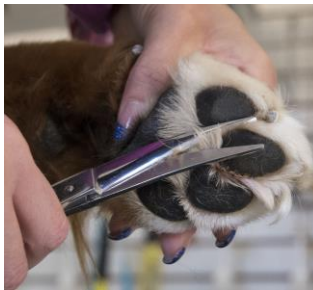
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pin brush, a metal-tined dog comb with medium spaced tines, scissors for trimming feet hair, and a shedding blade or mat rake for removing dead undercoat. Some people regularly brush dry coats without

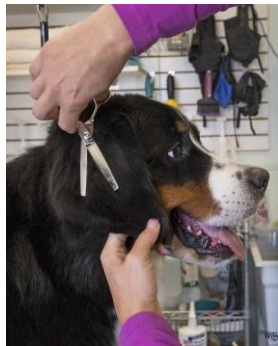


problems, while others suggest lightly misting the dog's coat with water. Be sure to get down to the skin in removing the undercoat when the dog is shedding. Bernese shed a lot and weekly brushing keeps more hair in the brush than about the home.

As stated in the BMD Breed Standard, coat trimming is minimal. With respect to the foot, many people prefer a neat foot. Carefully using electric clippers or straight scissors, the excess hair growing between the pads of the feet can be removed. When clipped, no hair would extend beyond the pads. This offers some safety benefits by improving traction on a slippery surface and, in the winter, preventing ice balls between the toes. Also, less dirt will be carried into the home. Feet can be trimmed on a grooming table or with the groomer sitting on the floor with the dog. The same is true for cutting nails.



Some owners trim the long, stringy hair that grows on the ears. However, this is a very personal preference. Some Berner owners treasure the long ear "fuzzies." Using thinning shears or by hand stripping, you can neaten the ear so that its shape is apparent. Choices in thinning shears include single- or double-sided models. The latter type gives a smoother, finished appearance. Since many people are initially hesitant to use



scissors, you might find it helpful to find someone experienced in grooming who can give you one-on-one instruction. While it is better to cut too little than too much, remember that it will always grow back!

If you want more information about grooming, consult some of the Berner-specific dog books or go to dog shows and

observe Berners being groomed. Ask questions of the owners and handlers, but take care not to interfere with their showing schedule. Again, remember that there are as many views on grooming as there are groomers!

Teeth: Like humans, a dog's teeth require care. Cleaning teeth is easy and must be done regularly. If you fall down on the job, your dog's teeth might have to be cleaned by your vet, and this could require anesthesia. Canine dental care involves frequent brushing and periodic scaling to remove tartar. If you choose to do minor scaling yourself, have your vet demonstrate the proper technique. Dental supplies and tools can be purchased at pet supply stores or online. Use in accordance with the instructions.

If dental hygiene is a challenge or if your dog tends to get tartar build-up, you might evaluate your feeding program and/or consult with your vet. There are special foods, treats, and oral rinses available to help keep dog's teeth in good condition. Some Berner owners give their dogs raw beef marrowbones or raw beef knucklebones as a natural way to maintain those pearly whites. Always introduce new foods slowly to avoid GI upset.

Grooming The Older Dog: Geriatric grooming requires an entirely different set of techniques. (See *Info Sheet – BMDs and Geriatric Care*)

One More Thing: You should have regular cuddle and massage sessions with your Berner when you rub and feel the dog's entire body and note sores, mats, lumps, swelling, etc. This helps you to identify and treat any problems early in their development. The dog really appreciates the massage too.

Supplies and Equipment ▶ So what do you need to get started? Before buying anything, shop around and compare prices, including shipping charges. Then, depending upon which approach to grooming that you choose, getting outfitted to groom at home might require a sizeable, one-time cash outlay. However, over a fairly short period of time, it is less expensive than regular trips to the professional groomer. The items in *italics* will be required even if you don't bathe and trim at home.

- *Stainless steel pin brush*
- *Combs – fine and medium (You might find that a comb with a handle is easier to hold.)*
- *Ear cleaner and cotton balls*
- *Dental care supplies*
- *Spray bottles*
- *Dog nail clipper or grinder (Consider a Dremel Multi Pro Drill with grinding stone or diamond bit.)*
- Scissors – Straight and thinning shears
- Dog shampoo
- Optional– grooming table, double bolt clamp, arm, noose with safety release, and forced-air dog dryer

Various Supply House Websites ▶

- Amazon – www.amazon.com
- Chewy – <https://www.chewy.com>
- Cherrybrook – <http://www.cherrybrook.com/>
- J-B Wholesale Pet Supplies Inc. – <http://www.ibpet.com/>
- Jeffers Pet – <http://www.jefferspet.com/ssc/>
- Petco – www.petco.com
- Pet Edge – <http://www.petedge.com/>
- Pet Smart – <http://www.petsmart.com/>
- Midwest Pet Wholesale – <https://midwestpetwholesale.com/>