



BMDCA Info Series

Tips on Buying a Bernese Mountain Dog

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Is a Bernese Mountain Dog Right for You? ►

Every breed has a typical size, temperament, and breed-specific health problems. Are you sure a Berner is right for you? A responsible breeder will go out of the way to guide you to an appropriate breed choice – maybe a Berner, maybe not. Beware of a breeder whose only goal is a quick sale.

Looking for a Berner Pup? ► Are you looking for a puppy that will mature into a healthy, long-lived dog? Do you want a dog that will grow up with your children? Do you know that the average lifespan of a Berner is 7 to 8 years? Do you know that diseases, such as cancer, run in dog families, just as in human families? Responsible breeders research and test for canine health problems and breed to minimize and eliminate them from their dogs. They know the lifespan and cause of death of most of the dogs in their pedigrees and breed for longevity. This level of commitment to research and knowledge is directly related to the quality of dogs they produce, and they willingly and honestly share their knowledge.



Have You Done Your Homework? ► Research the breed and breeders BEFORE you visit. Your chosen companion will be with you for many years to come. Time spent now will save heartbreak in the future. You may find Berner pups for sale across the country, and especially on the internet, but price is not an indicator of quality. The price of a puppy from a responsible breeder may range from \$3,000 - \$5,000. You should be given a multi-generation pedigree and informed about the puppy's family health history, temperament, and longevity. This includes copies of parental health tests. A pet store, for-profit breeder, and others may ask the same purchase price or more, and know only the pup's vaccination and worming records. AKC registration does not guarantee health or quality.

Not All Berners Are Alike ► Like people, dogs are individuals. Breeders do not produce "carbon copy" litters. The gentle, good nature of the breed should never be taken for granted. Some can be aggressive and some are very shy. Such dogs are a serious burden for any family. Responsible breeders

strive to breed only the best-tempered dogs. They invite you to meet their dogs and tell you the family temperament history.

Berners are well known for serious orthopedic problems, such as hip and elbow dysplasia, which can lead to a life of crippling pain, limited activity, and burdensome veterinary expenses. Generally, these problems are genetic, and a responsible breeder tests to minimize the chances of producing them.

Internet Research and Buying ► The Internet is a valuable source of information as you research different breeds and breeders. Many dog clubs and dog fanciers have websites filled with information. Careful study will be valuable, however, the Internet also caters to instant gratification – the "I want a puppy NOW" trap.

Breeders who want fast sales and few questions thrive in this environment. Responsible breeders can be found here too, but YOU must WORK to identify them. Ask a lot of questions and insist on clear, verifiable answers. Any time you shop long distance, Internet or otherwise, seek accurate information about the living conditions and backgrounds of the breeder's dogs. Puppy mills exist because, knowingly or unknowingly, dog buyers support them. Responsible breeders with websites are proud of their lines and prominently feature the registered names, titles, and health clearances for their dogs. Be a smart Internet shopper and know where your puppy got its start. The best approach is to find a breeder who you can visit in person.

Responsible Breeders ► As you interview breeders, evaluate their business practices and commitment to the breed, and to the individual dogs they own, breed, and sell. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, listen to your "gut feelings" and look elsewhere. Your dog's breeder should be someone whom you will feel comfortable calling any time in the future if you have questions or concerns about your Berner. You should feel that person will be there for you, not take your money and disappear. Never commit to a purchase or place a deposit without a written contract (including a guarantee of AKC registration papers) with which you are comfortable, a multi-generation pedigree, and detailed family health history. Written records of all transactions and agreements are your protection if problems arise and can save much heartache.

Responsible breeders breed with the goal of attaining the ideal in breed type, health, and temperament. They aim to improve each generation and know that markings alone do not make a Berner. They invest substantial time, effort, and resources in learning about and understanding the breed. If they are new to the breed, ask about their breed mentors who guide them in the history and knowledge of the breed. Breeders should explain their goals to you, both long-term and for a current litter.

For more information, please visit our website at www.bmdca.org.

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They should give you specific answers, not just “I want to produce nice puppies for nice people.” Conscientious breeders take the time to be certain that this purchase and this puppy are absolutely right for you. They stress the importance of staying in touch so they can track their puppies as they grow and use their health test results to improve their breeding programs. If you aren’t certain that you are dealing with a responsible, caring breeder, **please don’t buy the puppy.**

What to Look for/Buyer Beware ► Sales

Approach: Look for a breeder who:

- ✓ wants to get to know you and understand your expectations in a dog, and tries to match puppy temperament and character to you and your family.
- ✓ invites you to visit his/her dogs and facilities.
- ✓ encourages you to take your time in making the decision to add a new family member.
- ✓ provides evidence of the quality of the sire and dam, as well as their ancestors and relatives, via pedigrees, proof of titles, health and genetic clearances, and information on ages and causes of death.

Beware of anyone who:

- ✗ is anxious to sell you a dog before getting to know you and without regard for your needs and those of the puppy.
- ✗ won’t allow you to visit and see his/her dogs and facilities and wants to deliver your puppy to you somewhere else.
- ✗ requires a deposit before providing the pedigree, contract, and health information.
- ✗ rushes you to make a decision.
- ✗ sells and places puppies younger than 8 weeks of age.
- ✗ uses superlatives such as “top lines”, “excellent orthopedics”, and “no health problems” without validating these claims for all generations of the pedigree, especially the sire and dam.
- ✗ makes generalized statements that dogs imported from other countries are “healthier”, “sounder”, and “bred to higher standards” without proof of such claims.

Quality & Honesty of the Information Provided:

Seek a forthright breeder who:

- ✓ discusses both positive and negative aspects of the breed.
- ✓ evaluates each puppy for strengths and weaknesses, and seeks to match you with an appropriate puppy.
- ✓ asks you a lot of questions about lifestyle and expectations with the goal of a successful lifelong puppy placement.
- ✓ encourages questions and provides clear, specific answers.
- ✓ provides information on the care and training of a Berner.
- ✓ is open about the number of dogs owned, where and how they are housed, and the activities in which they participate, such as conformation, obedience, rally, agility, draft, etc.
- ✓ explains the goals and results of his/her breeding program.

Steer clear of anyone who:

- ✗ avoids discussing the prevailing problems in the breed or uses only sweeping generalizations that are flattering to the breed, his/her dogs, or the puppy being sold.
- ✗ considers all of the puppies to be perfect and right for you.
- ✗ has show-quality puppies at premium prices, but is unable to explain why other than proper markings.
- ✗ avoids or discourages your questions or takes offense at what is asked.
- ✗ doesn’t provide advice on grooming, feeding, and training.

- ✗ is vague about the number of dogs owned, where or how they are housed, what dog-related activities in which he/she participates, etc.
- ✗ isn’t able to share results of the bitch’s previous breedings.

Sales Agreements/Contracts:

A conscientious breeder:

- ✓ has a well-defined contract that clearly spells out the terms and conditions of sale, the responsibilities of both seller and buyer, and explains how the future of the dog is protected.
- ✓ provides well-defined written guarantees, and takes the time to be sure you understand any requirements you must fulfill to validate the guarantees.
- ✓ uses spay/neuter agreements and/or limited registrations for all pets and dogs that may not fulfill breeding-quality potential due to genetic faults.
- ✓ will mentor your involvement in the breed if you wish to become a breeder yourself.

Beware of anyone who:

- ✗ does not use a written contract at all or presents one that fails to protect the dog and/or the buyer.
- ✗ provides guarantees without outlining the details or conditions of those guarantees. (Guarantees can be contingent on the buyer performing in a way that may not be possible or desirable. If a guarantee requires you to return your puppy, would you want to do that?)
- ✗ requires you to breed your puppy when it grows up without regard to quality. Do you understand the responsibility and commitment required to breed? What will happen if you change your mind? Will the breeder repossess your dog?
- ✗ requires that you keep a male dog intact so the breeder can use him for breeding. Do you understand the challenging aspects of managing a stud dog?
- ✗ requires your dog be shown at your expense. This could also necessitate long absences from your family.
- ✗ doesn’t use limited registration and spay/neuter requirements in contracts for all puppies and dogs that do not fulfill breeding-quality potential due to genetic faults.
- ✗ doesn’t have any restrictions or future involvement with the buyer when selling puppies with full registration.
- ✗ sells a puppy for one price with full registration and another price if the same puppy is on limited registration.

Dog Club Affiliations and Other Issues:

Responsible breeders:

- ✓ are members of recognized dog clubs that actively seek to protect and preserve the future of the breed.
- ✓ do NOT sell breeding pairs.
- ✓ do NOT buy dogs or puppies from others for immediate resale. This is brokering and done for profit.
- ✓ do Not sell Berners to those who produce mixed breeds (“Bernerdoodles”).
- ✓ provide references upon request.
- ✓ will take a dog back and/or assist in re-homing.
- ✓ will care enough to call periodically to see how your puppy is doing and whether you have any questions or concerns.

Closing Thoughts ► There is a lot to consider when buying a dog. First, decide on a breed. Then find a responsible breeder who will work with you and for you in finding the right puppy. Doing your homework is worth it because you are looking for a new best friend!