



BMDCA Info Series

FAQs About Bernese Mountain Dogs

2023 #3

How much do Bernese puppies cost? The price varies and often is no indication of quality. The typical range is \$2,000-\$3,000 or higher, both from conscientious breeders and those who simply produce puppies for profit. Be aware that as high as the initial puppy price may be, the true cost of these dogs lies in ongoing maintenance costs, which include routine vet care, food, training, crate, toys, grooming tools and supplies, and more. If a dog becomes critically ill or requires surgery, expenses for treatment and hospitalization can be substantial – many times the purchase price of the dog. **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? Substantial expenses are incurred by conscientious breeders who are committed to protecting and promoting the interests and quality of the breed.

1) There are many recommended health tests (<https://www.bmdca.org/health>) that screen for hereditary diseases. These tests are both necessary and collectively expensive. Untested stud dogs and bitches will not be used in a responsible breeder’s breeding program. **Red flags:** Sellers who breed or import dogs without completing or requiring the recommended health tests and/or who breed dogs that do not have satisfactory health clearances should be avoided.

2) Stud fees for quality males are generally the price of a puppy plus expenses for transporting the bitch for breeding. Vet fees for services such as artificial insemination are also costly. Many breedings do not result in a litter.

3) Reproductive issues and complications are common in this breed. C-sections may be required. Litters might be small due to low conception rates or newborn mortality. The number of litters a bitch can have is limited by the breed’s shorter life span.

4) Conscientious breeders show their dogs at AKC-sanctioned shows to learn about the breed, assess how their own dogs compare to others, and research 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 actively learning about and is invested in the breed. Contact the BMDCA and regional BMD clubs for breeder 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 insist that you be given a multi-generation pedigree, health certifications, and written contract before you buy or make a deposit on 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 health history, 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, sturdy, striking, tri-colored, long-haired dog. Measured at the withers, dogs are 25 to 27 ½ inches; bitches are 23 to 26 inches. Weights of dogs and bitches generally range from 80-115 and 70-95 pounds, respectively.

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 fur in your food!

Are Bernese easy to train? Are they smart?

Berners 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. Berners are smart enough to manipulate their owners. Generally, most Bernese are very sensitive, impressionable dogs. Some may be “soft.” Bad or scary

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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 potential tendency does run in the breed. Due to temperament concerns it is very important to expose Berners 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. A Berner 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 Berner 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 their interactions with other family members.

Is their lifespan really only 7 to 8 years? Yes. Some live beyond ten years and some live only a short time. The most common cause of premature (prior to 7 years) death is cancer. Selective breeding for physical and character traits unique to the breed 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 collect health information on whole families of dogs, share that information through our open database at the Berner-Garde Foundation (<https://bernergarde.org/home/>), and use that information to make wise breeding decisions to improve health and longevity.

Are there any common health issues? As with most purebred dog breeds, Berners are affected by a variety of genetic diseases and other health issues. These include cancer, hip and elbow dysplasia, other orthopedic issues, bloat, eye diseases, autoimmune diseases, hypothyroidism, degenerative myelopathy (DM), 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 - <https://www.bmdca.org/health.>)

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.

- To become a well-behaved member of the family and society, **early socialization** and **training** are critical. 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 Berner will require about four cups of a premium dog food daily.
- In addition to routine **veterinary care**, every Berner 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. Sharing your dog's health information in the Berner-Garde database is very important. Sadly, many Berner 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 and adequate water are essential, with access to an air-conditioned environment preferred during extreme heat.
- With respect to **grooming**, this 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 to be considered when deciding if this is the breed for you. A daily minimum of 30 minutes of moderately vigorous exercise plus several trips outside are adequate for some Berners. 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 fit and pleasant companions.

Where did the Bernese Mountain Dog come from? What is its background?

Named for the Canton of Bern, this breed 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, sturdy 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 Mountain Dogs are a highly versatile breed. Dogs and their human companions enjoy competing in conformation, obedience, rally, agility, tracking, herding, carting, scent work, and more. Many Berners also make wonderful therapy dogs, bringing cheer to others. Individual dogs will enjoy and be successful in these various activities depending on their aptitude, structure, character, and temperament. Not every Berner will perform well in every event or activity.