



BMDCGTC Education Series

Questions To Ask A Breeder / Questions A Breeder May Ask You

Congratulations! You have decided that you want a Bernese Mountain Dog! And, if you're looking for a gorgeous, sweet, lovable, insistent, 100 lb. lap dog that will follow you everywhere, that sheds every day of the year but REALLY blows its coat twice a year (for weeks) and has a short lifespan.... Then this just may be the breed that has you wondering "how do I get a puppy as soon as possible?"

Let's start out with a true puppy search story about Aspen as told by his owners:

About a year ago, at this time of year, we were finally ready for a puppy! I could hardly contain my excitement. I had wanted my very own puppy for such a long time and now finally after the long wait I was going to be getting one of my very own!

Once we decided on a Berner we were faced with the daunting task of actually finding a puppy. I did what came to me naturally and did a Google search on Bernese Mountain Dog puppies were I stumbled across an ad saying they currently had puppies available. I couldn't get a puppy fast enough! I contacted the breeder via e-mail and she got back to us promptly. She was very nice on the phone and eager to set up a visit. She explained that her dogs were AKC registered, they had their OFA's done, and she said cancer rates were very low in her lines. She had us fill out a questionnaire and we arranged to make a visit. Everything seemed to be going perfect as we set out to go get our new Bernese puppy.

When we arrived at the breeder's home we were surprised to see 20 full-grown dogs outside in a pen and about a dozen Berner puppies. We felt a little uneasy about the situation but I couldn't leave without a puppy, so we went inside to sign a contract.

Here are the questions we asked:

- 1. How much does he cost?*
- 2. What do we feed him?*
- 3. We asked about his hernia.*
- 4. We asked about cancer.*

Here is what the breeder asked us:

- 1. Do you have pay pal or cash?*
- 2. Do you agree to the contract?*
- 3. Will you fill out this form? (where we lived, what we liked to do etc.)*

After signing the contract she handed us information on an umbilical hernia. She assured us this was of no concern just a cosmetic thing. We agreed and took our puppy now called Aspen home.

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

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From the moment we got him home he had horrible diarrhea. We called the breeder, but she was now uninterested in helping us. He refused to eat much of anything. When we brought him to the vet for his puppy checkup it was found his umbilical hernia was not closed and that he needed surgery. After his surgery he had regained his appetite but he continued to have health problems. He started limping shortly after we brought him home, structurally he just is not as sound as he should be, and he continues to struggle with chronic diarrhea. We have gone to many veterinarians and through many tests, including a visit to the University of Minnesota.

Although I realize that ANY puppy, regardless of their parents or breeder can become ill, we have come to believe that you greatly increase the odds of getting a healthy puppy by carefully selecting your breeder. While this may often take longer, they will support you as well as share their expertise. As puppy buyers we need to do research as our part in supporting the health and longevity of the breed. I hope that all new puppy owners will take the time to find a dedicated breeder who shares the love of the breed, rather than just being interested in turning over a profit. With Aspen, I just wanted a family pet and a partner in my social work career. I didn't want a "show dog". Now, as I have taken the time to take a closer look at breeders and compare them, my ideals have changed 100% When it comes time to get Aspen his new brother or sister we will be downright picky when it comes to finding a breeder!

The above story occurs much too frequently. It happens to first time buyers and also to those who may already have a pet but just aren't aware that there are ways to help improve their odds of enjoying a long and healthy life with their 4 legged family members.

The lists below aren't all inclusive when it comes to finding the best possible puppy for your family but they will certainly help point you in the right direction. They are a compilation of input from both puppy owners and breeders.

I will also add a few additional thoughts as it relates to getting a puppy:

- A reputable breeder will not place a third party between themselves and the owners of their dogs as the information provided by the owners is needed for the continued success of their breeding program.
- Try to find a breeder with a personality that fits with your own as they will be in your lives for about 10 years. The ups and downs of the behavior and health of your dog could bring about important changes in future breeding choices.
- It never hurts to start looking for the breeders you are interested in well before you are actually planning on getting a puppy as "bonding" with the breeder will give you a much better feel for who they are.
- The Berner Garde Health Database at www.bernergarde.org is a great tool for researching breeders and the health and longevity of their dogs. If you aren't finding this information in Berner Garde it might be a sign to keep looking for a breeder. *(See our document "Using the Berner Garde Database" for additional information.)*
- Ask to see the purchase contract before you actually go to see the puppies in person. It is much easier to review the contract and decide you don't agree with it when you aren't face

to face with the puppies. And, when face to face with the puppies it is much easier to sign a contract that you wouldn't have signed otherwise.

- A responsible breeder will take the time to learn about you, your life and the goals you have for your puppy. And, if they believe that the Bernese Mountain Dog isn't a good match they will take the time to explain why.



Questions for Prospective Puppy Owners (PPOs) to ask a breeder:

1. Can I visit and meet the prospective parent(s) of the puppy?
2. What are the health histories in the lines of the parents?
3. Do the parents have all health clearances (hip and elbow certifications, eye certification, heart certification) and ask to actually see these – don't just take their word for it.
4. Have the parents been tested for Von Willebrand (a clotting disorder)?
5. How is the longevity in the lines of both the parents?
6. What type of temperament do the parents have? What are the breed characteristics?
7. Can you tell me about your breeding program specifically and breeding ethics in general?
8. Why did you choose to breed these two dogs together?
9. How many litters do you have in an average year?
10. Where are your dogs kept?
11. How many dogs do you have?
12. Have the parents been shown (conformation, obedience, drafting, etc.)?
13. Do you sell your puppies on a contract? Is there any type of return policy and/or health guarantee?
14. Does this breed shed? How often will the dog need to be groomed?
15. What does the breeder expect from me, the PPO?
16. What are the best training methods for this breed?
17. Do you maintain contact with your families? (and How do you maintain contact?)
18. Do you belong to the BMDC of America and / or a local BMD Club?
19. Do you have references from the club(s) and previous dog owners?
20. What is the purchase price?



Questions A Breeder May Ask Prospective Puppy Owners (PPOs):

1. What do you know about the Bernese Mountain Dog?
2. Where do you live?
3. Do you live in a home with a yard?
4. Is your yard fenced?
5. If the situation isn't ideal – How are you going to accommodate the dog?
6. Do you have other pets?
7. Do you have children?
8. What type of hours do you work?
9. How long will the dog be left alone during the day?
10. Where will the dog stay when you are away from home?
11. Do you want a female or a male?
12. Do you plan to show or breed your dog?
13. Will you spay or neuter your dog?
14. What traits are you looking for in a dog?
15. What traits do you not want in your dog?
16. Do you belong to a BMD club?
17. Why do you want a BMD?
18. How do you see the dog fitting into your life?
19. If the dog gets ill someday, do you have a financial plan?
20. What activities / training do you think you are interested in doing with your dog?

