

BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG CLUB OF NASHOBA VALLEY

Resource Guide



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Welcome to the BMDCNV Resource Guide on the Bernese Mountain Dog.

We hope to make you aware of some key natural characteristics and abilities of the Bernese Mountain Dog, and provide a reference guide for further information.

Please feel free to use any information on the BMDCNV Resource Guide pages. We ask that you cite the BMDCNV as your source. Comments and suggestions regarding this Resource Guide should be addressed to:

The Editor
1 Essex Road
Medfield, MA 02052

or sent e-mail to [The Cohen Family](#).

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INTRODUCTION

Our portrayal is based on the experience of many long time members involved in all aspects of the breed.

It is not hard to find many wonderful things to say about these dogs. Many owners think there is nothing better than a Bernese Mountain Dog, unless it is two Bernese Mountain Dogs. But if you are trying to decide if you are right for a Bernese Mountain Dog, we think it is important to not just sing their praises. This candid discussion should only be one part of your decision making process. We hope you make as informed a decision as possible, even if your final decision turns out to be "no" at this time.

You should assess your own strengths and weaknesses and see how well your personality and abilities mesh with that of the dogs'. A successful, enduring match will be made when the specific breed characteristics are compatible with your human lifestyle. Our club will do all we can to help educate you and help you develop the special relationship offered only by a Berner.

The American Kennel Club Standard for the Bernese Mountain Dog.

Each AKC recognized breed has a standard. Ours is an excellent starting point for learning the basic characteristics the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America (BMDCA) feels are key in making the Bernese Mountain Dog unique among other breeds. Keep in mind as you read this that both males (dogs) and females (bitches) are working dogs -- draft animals pulling loads around the farm and to market. See our [Resource page](#) at the end of this guide for sources with more detailed information.

General Appearance

The Bernese Mountain Dog is a striking, tri-colored, large dog. He is sturdy and balanced. He is intelligent, strong and agile enough to do the draft and droving work for which he was used in the mountainous regions of his origin.

Dogs appear masculine, while bitches are distinctly feminine.

Size, Proportion, Substance

Measured at the withers, dogs are 25 to 27-1/2 inches, bitches are 23 to 26 inches. Though appearing

square, Bernese Mountain Dogs are slightly longer in body than they are tall. Sturdy bone is of great importance. The body is full.

Head

Expression is intelligent, animated and gentle. The eyes are dark brown and slightly oval in shape with close fitting lids. Inverted or everted eyelids are serious faults. Blue eye color is a disqualification. The ears are medium sized, set high, triangular in shape, gently rounded at the tip, and hang close to the head when in repose. When the Bernese Mountain Dog is alert, the ears are brought forward and raised at the base; the top of the ear is level with the top of the skull. The skull is flat on top and broad, with a slight furrow and a well-defined, but not exaggerated stop. The muzzle is strong and straight. The nose is always black. The lips are clean and, as the Bernese Mountain Dog is a drymouthed breed, the flews are only slightly developed. The teeth meet in a scissors bite. An overshot or undershot bite is a serious fault. Dentition is complete.

Neck, Topline, Body

The neck is strong, muscular and medium length. The topline is level from the withers to the croup. The chest is deep and capacious with well sprung, but not barrel-shaped, ribs and brisket reaching at least to the elbows. The back is broad and firm. The loin is strong. The croup is broad and smoothly rounded to the tail insertion. The tail is bushy. It should be carried low when in repose. An upward swirl is permissible when the dog is alert, but the tail may never curl or be carried over the back. The bones in the tail should feel straight and should reach to the hock joint or below. A kink in the tail is a fault.

Forequarters

The shoulders are moderately laid back, flat lying, well muscled and never loose. The legs are straight and strong and the elbows are well under the shoulder when the dog is standing. The pasterns slope very slightly, but are never weak. Dewclaws may be removed. The feet are round and compact with well arched toes.

Hindquarters

The thighs are broad, strong and muscular. The stifles are moderately bent and taper smoothly into the hocks. The hocks are well let down and straight as viewed from the rear. Dewclaws should be removed. Feet are compact and turn neither in nor out.

Coat

The coat is thick, moderately long and slightly wavy or straight. It has a bright natural sheen. Extremely curly or extremely dull looking coats are undesirable. The Bernese Mountain Dog is shown in natural coat and undue trimming is to be discouraged.

Color and Markings

The Bernese Mountain Dog is tri-colored. The ground color is jet black. The markings are rich rust and clear white. Symmetry of markings is desired. Rust appears over each eye, on the cheeks reaching at least to the corner of the mouth, on each side of the chest, on all four legs and under the tail. There is a white blaze and

muzzle band. A white marking on the chest typically forms an inverted cross. The tip of the tail is white. White on the feet is desired but must not extend higher than the pasterns. Markings other than described are to be faulted in direct relationship to the extent of the deviation. White legs or a white collar are serious faults. Any ground color other than black is a disqualification.

Gait

The natural working gait of the Bernese Mountain Dog is a slow trot. However, in keeping with his use in draft and droving work, he is capable of speed and agility. There is good reach in front. Powerful drive from the rear is transmitted through a level back. There is no wasted action. Front and rear legs on each side follow through the same plane. At increased speed, legs tend to converge toward the center line.

Temperament

The temperament is self-confident, alert, and good natured, never sharp or shy. The Bernese Mountain Dog should stand steady, though may remain aloof to the actual attentions of strangers.

Disqualifications

Blue eye color.

Any ground color other than black.

For a hard copy of the Resource Guide, including a current Breeders List and a BMDCNV Membership Application, please send a check in the amount of **\$5.00 U.S.** made out to: BMDCNV. This is to cover postage and handling.

Mail request to:

BMDCNV Breeder Referral
PO Box 531
Gilbertville, MA 01031

Please be advised that the only requirement to be on the Breeders List is to be a member in good standing of the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Nashoba Valley (BMDCNV). The BMDCNV does not endorse or recommend specific breeders or dogs, nor do we guarantee the services of said breeders. Rather we encourage you to become knowledgeable about this breed and then make an educated decision when choosing a breeder and puppy.

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CONSIDERATIONS

If you are thinking about getting any dog, there are several major factors to think about, some of which apply particularly to Bernese Mountain Dogs. Our [Resource page](#) lists some books and videos we find helpful.

Will your dog be allowed in the house, or will it be chained up outside? A Berner isolated in a yard is pretty much guaranteed to become a miserable, shy, 100 pound problem dog. Please keep in mind that the Bernese Mountain Dog has been bred not as a farm dog, but as a farmer's dog. Bred to be at his side as his companion -- in the house, around the yard, going to town in his truck, doing his errands, even lying quietly at his feet in a coffee shop.

Will you be able to provide daily exercise? A young dog with a lot of energy will blow off steam as it sees fit (eating the sofa, walking on the kitchen counters) if you do not channel it into more acceptable activities. Even if you have a big, fenced in yard, you will find that your dog won't run around playing fetch by itself.

Are you willing to go to dog school for the basics and read some dog training and behavior books? As the owner of a big dog, you have a responsibility to see that it is well behaved. There is always something new to learn about training a dog, especially if it is a breed you haven't trained before.

If this is to be a family dog, is everyone willing to accept responsibility for meeting the dog's needs? If the primary caregiver becomes unable to take care of the dog, will others pick up the slack? If this is to be a child's dog, what will happen if the child develops other interests or proves too irresponsible for a pet? We have seen more than a few dogs in our Rescue program who started out as "the husband's dog." When the majority of dog care ended up the responsibility of the unwilling wife, our club became the resource left with the task of trying to place an untrained, unsocialized, unwanted dog. We do not believe a dog is a disposable commodity. We'd prefer you to get goldfish, rather than a Berner, if you think you will get rid of it "if it doesn't work out."

Do you mind dog hair? Bernese shed more than the books lead you to believe. We call it Bernerfur and we all have at least one red velvet lint brush.

Want to take your dog jogging with you 365 days a year? Unless you live in the Northwest Territory of Canada, that won't be your Berner out there pounding the pavement with you. Many disappear into the basement in June, and only come out for meals or air conditioned car rides for the duration of the summer. They will also dig holes in your yard to get to cool earth. Flower beds are the easiest place to dig. Consider

how you will react to this natural behavior of your dog.

Berners do very nicely in the obedience ring, they do well in agility, and some will even play Frisbee. But they do it mainly to please their owners, and in their own unique style. The average Berner should not be counted on to become a National Frisbee champion or a dog with an Obedience Trial Championship (OTCh). There are other breeds more suited for continuous performance at those levels.

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TRAINING

Just as each pup is unique physically, so do they differ in their manner of learning. No matter what their style, desirable behaviors (sitting on command, coming when called, walking nicely on a leash) can be shaped painlessly and enjoyably, with persistence, when young.

Bernese are companion dogs as well as working dogs. In American society today, if you hope to have your dog with you as much as possible, you must socialize and train your dogs in basic manners. The more places you take him as a pup, and gently but firmly demonstrate his need to listen to you no matter what the circumstances, the more you will be able to do with him. When you acquire a noticeable dog like a Berner, you instantly become an ambassador for the breed.

Your attitude is everything. If you believe 100% that there is no way you will ever have a dog who walks nicely on a leash, you will live up to (actually down to) your expectation. But if you have the tiniest glimmer of hope that it can be done, we ask that you act from that part of your heart.

Do not delay! Our Training Resource person can help you find a fun puppy class where the dogs are not mindlessly jerked around on leashes, but have their behaviors shaped using hugs, treats and toys. Read the dog training books we recommend to amplify what you learn in school. Sort out the techniques which seem the most reasonable and applicable to your situation. Training a dog is an art, not a science. Don't just think of dog school as a place you go to get started. It is also of tremendous benefit when your pet hits that willful adolescent stage.

If you are not trained to train your dog, your Berner will easily train you. Bernese are sensitive, but they are smart. Everything can't be all kissy kissy. Limits must be firmly set in a matter of fact manner as well, or else you might end up sitting on the floor while your dog gets the couch.

You *can* teach an old dogs new tricks, so there is no excuse for you not to re-examine your old ideas on training dogs, and learn ones that suit the dog you have before you. There are people who can train the largest of dogs without great physical strength, stun collars or whacking them. It is a matter of attitude, which you have an opportunity to now start developing.

A familiar refrain from those of us who have more than one dog is, "I never had a dog before who did ..." Every dog will present unique challenges in training. If you think of them as opportunities for you to learn something new, you and your dog will be well served.

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LOOK CAREFULLY

Each year the BMDCNV organizes several kinds of dog/people events throughout New England. These events are ideal opportunities for establishing contacts and seeing a cross section of Berners in one place. Joining the BMDCNV before you get a dog is a great way to make informative and interesting connections.

We sponsor the showing of Bernese in some of the major all-breed and obedience shows in the region. Most dog shows are run under the aegis of the American Kennel Club (AKC). Contact a member of the Board of Directors for information on upcoming club events. Check our Resource pages for some magazines and books which will help you find and understand what goes on at a dog show.

The purpose of a dog show is to showcase breeding stock. The breed standard details the basic physical properties and traits that make up an ideal specimen of that breed. In the ring the dog is judged against the ideal outlined in the breed standard.

If a dog meets the criteria listed in the breed standard, is not spayed or neutered, and does not have any health problems which would prevent it being used as breeding stock, it is technically able to be shown in the breed ring at the dog show. These dogs are often termed, "show quality", but a more accurate term might be "show prospect." Being technically eligible for competing does not mean it will compete successfully or go on to earn a title.

A dog should not be shown in a breed competition if it has problems which compromise its health or prevent it from being used for breeding -- even if those problems are not visible.

At a show, arrive early. Purchase a catalog which will list the time and ring in which the dogs will be shown. Bernese are part of the Working Group. In the catalog, each dog or bitch is listed by number and name. You can identify who is who in the ring by the numbered armband worn by the handler. The number on the armband matches the number in the catalog. The birthdate of the dog, names of the owner, handler, breeder and dog's parents are also listed in the catalog under the entry number. In the back of the catalog are addresses.

Dogs that successfully compete in breed shows under different judges earn the AKC title of Champion. The prefix Ch. is then used before a dog's full name (e.g. Ch. Bernerfur's Big Harry Boy). Bernese may also be shown in working events, such as obedience, agility, carting, tracking and Canine Good Citizen tests. Successful completion in these trials is indicated by the titles following the dogs name (e.g. Bernerfur's Big

Harry Boy, CDX, DD).

If a dog is registered with the AKC, the registration certificate is the dog's "papers." "Papers" are simply a registration device. The mere fact that a dog has "papers" is no guarantee of quality. A "pet quality" dog does not conform to the breed standard sufficiently to be shown in a breed competition. Our breed standard lists only two disqualifying faults - blue eye and a ground color other than black. Other "faults" are more subjective. A "pet quality" dog is every bit as good a companion as a "show prospect" dog. Pet quality dogs which are physically capable of the work required can still enter the working events and receive titles in them. And of course, we think all Bernese are pets, first and foremost!

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CONTRACTS

When purchasing a small puppy, no one can really tell what that puppy's ultimate quality as an adult will be. A written contract between you and the breeder is to both your benefits.

Price varies from breeder to breeder. Current prices range from about \$700-1200+ per dog. Usually a price difference exists between show prospects and pet quality dogs, and perhaps a price difference between males and females of equal quality. Price alone is no indicator of quality.

No one contract will cover every contingency, but an experienced breeder will want to clarify many issues ahead of time in a written contract. Some breeders prefer to sell their pups with a spay/neuter stipulation. The contract should spell out what will be the responsibilities of the breeder and owner should the puppy turn out other than anticipated. For instance: if you are paying more for a puppy as a show prospect than you would for pet quality, what if the puppy turns out to not be show quality? If it turns out that the puppy has a serious congenital health problem, does the contract specify what steps the breeder will take - e.g., refund, replacement, financial assistance with medical treatment, etc.?

Do not lose sight of the fact that by the time the problem is found, you might have fallen in love with your pup, and may not want to give it back, or you might be disenchanted with your breeder, and would not want another pup from their kennel.

If for some reason you end up unable to keep your puppy, your breeder might want first refusal on placing him in a new home. The BMDCNV does have a formal Rescue program for placing dogs, if necessary.

Puppies may be designated for limited registration by the breeder. This means the dog may not be shown in the breed ring, and any offspring may not be registered with the AKC. Should a pup turn out to be showable in the breed ring, limited registrations may be changed to full registrations only by the breeder. Limited registration dogs may be shown in all working events.

When two or more people jointly own a dog, they are co-owners. Co-ownership agreements are commonly between a breeder and purchaser, but can consist of other groups or people.

There are as many kinds of co-ownership agreements as there are co-owners. It can be difficult to understand the full legal and emotional ramifications of a co-ownership contract. Co-ownership disputes are a source of daily complaints at the AKC.

Try to have someone knowledgeable go over the contract with you. Careful review of any contract is strongly encouraged, especially if this is your first pedigreed dog. Our [Resource page](#) has an address for the AKC for registration matters. They have some very good booklets available covering registration topics. Some of the other books listed also have chapters devoted to purchasing a pup.

See our [Code of Ethics](#) for what a member breeder is minimally responsible for supplying at the time you purchase your pup.

Make sure the AKC registration application ("papers") is signed over to you by the breeder at time of purchase. If there is a foul up with the AKC (it does happen) and the breeder does not have the papers at the time you purchase a registered puppy, you may wish to reserve part of your payment until the papers come through.

Please be aware of the fact that you are committing not just your heart to a cute pup, but you are making a financial commitment to make sure it receives proper food and health care for as long as it is with you. The bigger the dog, the bigger the bills. For routine health care, food and maintenance for a mature dog, figure \$500-\$700 per year total expenses if no problems develop. Of that amount, the annual vet visit with all shots, heartworm and stool tests, and a supply of heartworm pills will be in the \$150-\$250 range. As examples of expenses should problems occur: surgery to repair a congenitally bad joint is at least several hundred dollars, emergency treatment and aftercare for bloat at a major vet hospital is over \$1,000.

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HEALTH

The monthly newsletter of the BMDCNV, BERNERBLATT, is key in keeping our members informed on the most current health issues.

The #1 cause of death in all domestic dogs is us: people! About a third of the dogs born in the U.S. never see their second birthday. They are euthanised as unwanted, abandoned or lost dogs in shelters, or die getting hit by a car when running loose. Unfortunately, these fates also befall our beloved Berners. The cheapest form of health insurance is buying a leash, learning how to use it, and training your dog.

The Swiss have a saying about the lifespan of Bernese Mountain Dogs. They say, "Three years a young dog, three years a good dog, three years an old dog ... and three years a gift from God."

In America, at this time, the average age of a Berner at death is about 7 years, though many books say the average life span is 10 to 12 years. The quality of the bond with our dogs increases as they age so that even 12 years is much too brief.

We know the average life span of a Berner because the BMDCA was among the very first AKC clubs to have a national database. Through the efforts of dedicated Bernese people, there exists a computer database of over 10,000 Bernese Mountain Dogs, 900+ kennels, and 2000+ litters, with their attendant health information. Participation in the database is voluntary, and strongly encouraged by the BMDCNV. We hope that all breeders participate and will have researched health data for their bitch, stud, and as many near relatives as possible. They will thus be able to provide you with detailed information, which could prove invaluable as your dog ages. Discuss any data you have with your breeder to verify its accuracy, and let our manager know of any corrections or changes.

The database has been a useful tool for identifying health problems in our breed. We know Bernese do have a higher than average incidence of **cancer**. Besides the typical canine cancers, Bernese can have histiocytosis -- an heritable cancer which seems to be specific for our breed alone. There is an ongoing cancer study to pinpoint and discern patterns of the cancers which are a particular problem for our breed. The Berner-Garde Foundation has been established to understand and reduce genetic disease in Bernese Mountain Dogs.

Structural problems can afflict our dogs, as they do other breeds. Hip dysplasia is a progressive, degenerative disease involving a malformation of the hip socket joint. It ranges from very mild with no

apparent effects, to severe enough to require euthanasia. There is no medical agreement on exact causes but appears to have both genetic and environmental causes. The term 'hips clear' is often used as a bit of a buzz phrase to imply a dog is structurally sound. Hips aren't the only part that can be unsound. Current data suggests that in Bernese, there are more bad elbows and shoulders than there are bad hips.

We continue to debate the relative merits of the various screening organizations and techniques available for evaluating and/or predicting joint problems. No one method is 100% accurate. The oldest organization is the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). If a breeder submits X-rays of a dog's hips or elbows to the OFA, radiologists will analyze those X-rays. If they are deemed free of dysplasia, the dog will get a numbered OFA certificate with a rating of Fair, Good, or Excellent. If there is evidence of dysplasia, no number is assigned. An OFA # on a parent does NOT necessarily mean the offspring will have good joints. This is a very complex issue. Please see our [Resource page](#) for the names and addresses of other screening organizations. The PennHIP methodology of screening is relatively new and can be used on very young dogs. It could prove to be a very valuable tool to the potential puppy buyer.

Bernese have a body type which makes them susceptible to **bloat**, which can be a life threatening emergency medical situation. This can run in families. Our dogs, like other breeds, can have kidney problems, skin problems, autoimmune problems and certain vision problems.

Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) is a hereditary disease of the eye that has been identified in Bernese Mountain Dogs. PRA is a blanket term for many types of retinal diseases, all of which result in blindness. All Bernese Mountain Dogs, regardless of age or breeding status, should be examined yearly by a member of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (A.C.V.O.). Once examined and found free of evidence of heritable eye disease, a number and certificate can be obtained from the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF). This is called a CERF number. The CERF is an organization that collects data on dogs examined by members of the A.C.V.O. and registers those dogs that have been certified free of evidence of heritable eye disease.

The BMDCA has as a resource several veterinarian/members who keep track of the latest information, trends and treatments for various body systems of the Bernese. And of course, club members are always willing to share their scientific and not-so-scientific insights into health matters based on personal experience.

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FOOD & GROWTH

Everyone seems to have their own strongly held opinion on just what is the best food for a growing pup and dog. Additionally, there is the whole issue of supplementation with vitamins and minerals.

Believe it or not, the food you feed your dog can cause problems with ears, skin, and even behavior. Within our club, people feed the range from home-made food to feed-store kibble. Generally, most people agree on keeping the protein level relatively low, approximately 16 - 21%, and feeding a good quality food which you know is fresh.

Whether grain based or meat based, you will have to do some searching to find out what works best for your particular dog. Quantity will vary according to the season and the amount of exercise they get. A one year old dog will still be growing and will be eating more than he will by the time he's three. The most important thing, especially for a pup, is to monitor his intake and make sure your dog does not get overweight. Some breeders and vets do not even recommend puppy food, feeling that it encourages too rapid growth which is detrimental to the developing bone structure. Others believe in heavy addition of supplements. Do read, consult with your veterinarian and breeder to make as informed a decision as possible.

Environmental factors can also influence structural development. You may have waited for a long time for this pup, but please exercise restraint in going for long walks. Discourage leaping and jumping. Skid resistant rugs might be needed to eliminate slippery stairs and floors. Even those very active pups, willing to go 24 hours a day, need rest and quiet time.

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RESOURCES

BOOKS:

Bernese Mountain Dogs

The New Bernese Mountain Dog
Sharon Smith
Howell Book House 1994

The Complete Bernese Mountain Dog
Jude Simonds
Ringpress Books 1989

Selecting a breed:

AKC Complete Dog Book
AKC 1997

The Right Dog For You
Daniel F. Tortora, PhD
Simon and Schuster 1980

General Training:

Mother Knows Best
Carol Lea Benjamin
Howell Book House 1993

What All Good Dogs Should Know
Volhard and Bartlett
Howell Book House 1991

Behavior:

Surviving Your Dogs Adolescence

Carol Lea Benjamin

Howell Book House 1993

Dog Behavior: Why Dogs Do the Things They Do

Dr. Ian Dunbar

TfH Publications 1979

Specialized Training:

The Winning Edge: Show Ring Secrets

Alston/Vanacore

Howell Book House 1992

Dog Tricks Step by Step

Zeigenfuse & Walker

Howell Book House 1997

Health:

Dog Owner's Home Veterinary Handbook

Carlson & Griffin

Howell Book House 1992

Holistic Guide for a Healthy Dog

Volhard and Brown

Howell Book House 1995

Dogwise has all books and videos listed. Reach them at 1-800-776-2665 or www.dogwise.com

MAGAZINES

American Kennel Club Gazette

5580 Centerview Drive

Raleigh, N.C. 27606

(919) 233-9780

Northeast Canine Companion

PO Box 377

Sudbury, MA 01776

(978) 442-8378

VIDEOTAPES

Sirius Puppy Training
Ian Dunbar
Janus & Kenneth Publishers

American Kennel Club Breed Video
The Bernese Mountain Dog

RESOURCES

BMDCA:

<http://www.bmd.org/bmdca.html>

AKC:

Main Office:

51 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10010
(212) 696-8200

Registration Matters:

5580 Centerview Dr.
Raleigh, NC 27606
(919) 233-9767

Public Relations/Education:

5580 Centerview Dr.
Raleigh, NC
(919) 233-3710

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Lori Jodar (Chair)
07999 US 31 N., 505
Charlevoix, MI
(616) 547-5705

GDC:

Institute for Genetic Disease Control in Animals
P.O. Box 222
Davis, CA 95617
(916) 756-6773

OFA:

Orthopedic Foundation for Animals
2300 Nifong Blvd.
Columbia, MO 65201
(314) 442-0148

PennHIP:

271 Great Valley Pkwy.
Malvern, PA 19355
(800) 248-8099

CERF:

1248 Lynn Hall
Purdue University
Lafayette, IN 47907
(317) 494-8179

For a hard copy of the Resource Guide, including a current Breeders List and a BMDCNV Membership Application, please send a check in the amount of **\$5.00 U.S.** made out to: BMDCNV. This is to cover postage and handling.

Mail request to:

BMDCNV Breeder Referral
PO Box 531
Gilbertville, MA 01031

Please be advised that the only requirement to be on the Breeders List is to be a member in good standing of the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Nashoba Valley (BMDCNV). The BMDCNV does not endorse or recommend specific breeders or dogs, nor do we guarantee the services of said breeders. Rather we encourage you to become knowledgeable about this breed and then make an educated decision when choosing a breeder and puppy.