

So, You Want a Bernerdoodle?

By Nancy P. Melone, PhD

You've seen your neighbor's cute Bernerdoodle puppy, a "new dog breed", and you've just got to have one. The ad on the website says it is the "perfect dog". What could be better than a breed that is hypoallergenic, does not shed, requires almost no grooming, and is much healthier than a Bernese Mountain Dog? But wait? Are the Bernerdoodle ads really true?

Myth 1: A Bernerdoodle is a new dog breed.

What is that old saying about the silk purse and the sow's ear? A Bernerdoodle is a mix-breed dog made up of two different breeds. A Bernerdoodle is not a Berner. A Bernerdoodle is not a poodle. It is a mix. If you breed your Bernerdoodle to another Bernerdoodle, the odds are the puppies would not look the same as either of the parents. If you breed a Berner to another Berner, the odds are the puppies would look like its Berner parents. The same is true for a poodle-to-poodle breeding. A breed has a consistent look and behavior. A Bernerdoodle does not. Furthermore, reputable Berner breeders would never knowingly sell their dogs for such doodle breeding, so the Berners used for your doodle are not likely to come from the best lines in terms of either health or appearance.

Myth 2: A Bernerdoodle is hypoallergenic.

"Ah choo!" Proteins in a dog's dander and saliva, not its hair, are the allergens responsible for allergic reactions to dogs. Recent studies question the existence of "hypoallergenic breeds" and offer empirical support that the breeds (including "designer breeds") do not differ significantly in the generation of these allergens. Indeed, one study found so-called "hypoallergenic breeds" to have significantly more allergen in their coats than non-hypoallergenic breeds although it found no difference in the allergen levels in the air or on the floor. While the level of dander and saliva can vary across individual dogs for various reasons, they do not vary systematically across breeds. The hard truth is that recent science does not support the existence of "hypoallergenic breeds".

Myth 3: A Bernerdoodle does not shed.

If a dog has hair, it sheds. Between a hair starting to grow and eventually falling out, each hair on your dog's body passes through a four-stage lifecycle: anagen (growth), catagen (transition), telogen (rest) and exogen (shedding, i.e., the new hair pushes the old hair out of the follicle). Every hair on the dog is at a different stage of this growth cycle. If a dog has hair, the hair will go through these stages and eventually be shed. Bernerdoodles have hair, so they shed like any other dog with hair. For dogs with extremely curly coats, it may seem like the dog is shedless. In fact, the curly coat catches the curly dead hairs, unless they are brushed out by the owner. If the dead hairs are not brushed out regularly, they can easily become matted and cause serious skin irritation or infection...which gets us to the next Bernerdoodle myth.

Myth 4: A Bernerdoodle requires minimal or no grooming.

Don't count on saving any money at the groomer. What you save by not grooming your Bernerdoodle you will likely spend at the veterinarian treating its skin infections caused by matted hair. Talk to any groomer about how easy it is to groom a Bernerdoodle whose kinky coat has not been groomed regularly. If the mats are severe, most professional groomers will recommend shaving the dog. They will likely charge extra because of the extra time it will take them to groom an unkempt dog. If the Bernerdoodle owner balks at the added, unexpected cost, the groomer may just refuse to accept the dog as a client. Advice from allergists to serious dog-loving allergy sufferers is to bathe the dog twice a week to remove the coat of allergens from dander and saliva...another reason to see a groomer.

Myth 5: A Bernerdoodle (mixed breed) is healthier than a purebred dog.

Not so fast! Like most things in life, it is more complicated. In a University of California at Davis study of 24 genetic disorders in 27,000 purebred and mixed breeds, researchers found there was no difference between purebreds and mixed breeds in genetic disorder incidence for 13 of the 24 genetic diseases examined. The incidence of 10 genetic disorders (e.g., aortic stenosis, DCM, atopy/allergic dermatitis, IVDD, elbow dysplasia, bloat, cataracts, liver shunts) was significantly greater in purebred dogs, however mixed breed dogs had more cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) tears than purebred dogs. Interestingly, there was *no difference across purebreds and mixed breeds for several deadly cancers and orthopedic defects*, including hemangiosarcoma, lymphoma, mast cell tumors, osteosarcoma, hip dysplasia or luxating patellas.

To the extent that Bernerdoodles are a mix of two genetically less diverse pure breeds rather than some canine Casanova from the other side of the tracks, the Bernerdoodle fancier might wish to hold off touting superior health over purebreds.

The best information for any puppy search is a complete certified (minimal 4-generation) pedigree with health certifications for dogs in the pedigree and age of death (AOD) and cause of death (COD) information for deceased ancestors. A pup's pedigree that crosses out full registered names of certain pure-bred dogs, does not provide health certifications for ALL or most of the dogs, or does not include AOD/ COD for all or most of the deceased dogs in the pedigree, tells you virtually nothing about a pup's prospects for a long, healthy life. Don't be a Doodle Dunce by exclusively focusing on the sire's and dam's hip scores while ignoring the overall health and longevity of the rest of the dogs in the pup's pedigree.

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With enough money you can buy anything—including a "pig in a poke", (an overpriced view of) the Brooklyn Bridge, (temporary) "love", or a dud of a doodle dog. Why buy a mixed breed Bernerdoodle for \$5,000+ when you can get the real thing (a poodle or a Berner) for \$2500-3500 and get the forever support of a responsible breeder and a pedigree that is certified—for no extra charge?

Be a smart dog buyer. Get ALL the facts before you pay thousands for what you could buy at your local dog pound for \$100 if you truly wanted a poodle-mixed breed dog (with all the mystery and excitement of its unpredictable genetics and unverified pedigree).

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