



## **Bennington Retrievers Guardian Family Policy**

My goal in having guardian families is to give the dogs a part of my program normal, “family” lives. By placing them in a home environment that will be their forever home from the time they are puppies, or by placing as a young adult, I am doing my best to ensure their happiness and best life.

For those who can not afford to purchase a Bernese Mountain Dog or Labrador outright, the guardian home option is a fantastic way to have a beautiful, high quality dog. This is also a great opportunity for those who simply like the idea of how our program works and want to be a part of it with me.

I benefit as a breeder because I do not need to have or utilize kennels. I do not have to care for more dogs than I am comfortable with or can manage easily in my own home. Additionally, I get the peace of knowing each dog has a forever home from the time they are young.

I’m sure you have lots of questions about the guardian program. The collection of questions and answers below is my best attempt to address all questions right up front so someone does not feel like they weren’t really aware of how this program works. Hopefully the information doesn’t overwhelm you. It really is a very simple program even though it may seem like it has a lot of details.

### **What guidelines do I have to follow when raising the puppy or dog?**

Guardian families must feed a dog food approved by me. I am an advocate of health nutrition for dogs, and for feeding foods that will not cause health issues, things like cancers, tumors, allergies, etc. The foods I will ask you to feed are easily found, or ordered from Chewy.

I require the family to avoid all chemicals unless necessary, and to not give supplements or medicines unless approved by us. This includes flea, heartworm, or any other meds. We use Advantage and Frontline for the flea medications and your Vet will prescribe the heartworm medication.

If the dog becomes sick or injured, I would need the family to notify me right away so I can be involved in all decisions regarding the treatment of the dog.

I ask the family to practice safe handling of the dog. To not leave the dog outside if they are not at home. Don’t let the dog sit in the back of an open pickup. Use a leash in public. Provide basic obedience training so the dog has manners. All things that should be done to protect your dog

anyway.

The guardian home is responsible for the transportation of the dog to me when needed for breeding, litters, or health testing. This is the most inconvenient part of the guardian responsibilities. Please think through this carefully. I will not meet families or pick up dogs myself. This is the guardian home responsibility and part of how they earn the dog through the program. Should you be unable to drop off or pick up your dog, I can usually arrange for someone else to do so at the cost of \$100 per trip.

### **What age do you start breeding the dog?**

I will usually breed on the first heat following when the dog reaches 12 months of age. If a dog goes into heat at any time beyond 12 months, you must notify me immediately so I can assess whether or not I will breed. This will depend on how many other girls are cycling and having litters, as well as the individual dogs age and situation. I would also like to be notified when your puppy has its first cycle, somewhere around 9-12 months of age, so we can have a calculated guess on when her next cycle will be.

### **How long is she with you when you breed?**

As soon as the family is aware the dog is in heat I will have them arrange to bring the dog to me by day 5 – 7 of the heat cycle. She will remain with me for about one week, and then they can pick her up and take her back home. If you are unable to drop off or pick up the dog within 1-2 days of when needed, you will be required to find someone else who can do so for you, or I can arrange for a pick up/drop off for \$100 per trip.

### **How long is a dog pregnant?**

Dogs are pregnant for 63 days.

### **How long is she with you when she has the litter?**

She will come to me between 7-9 days before she is due with her litter. This gives her time to settle into my house, get used to seeing the whelping box. It is important that she becomes very comfortable with being in my house and being with me all the time. I do not want the mom to feel threatened by me when she is getting ready to whelp. She will go home after puppies are weaned. This will be between 6 and 7 weeks of age.

### **Can we visit her when she has the puppies?**

I do not allow guardian homes to visit until puppies are at least 4 weeks of age. Please be aware though that handling of the puppies may not be allowed. You may visit the guardian dog and spend some time with her if she is doing well with leaving her puppies for short periods of time.

### **Does this negatively affect the dog emotionally to go from the guardian home to the breeder's home?**

No. There will be an initial “Where is my family going?” when they bring her to me, but dogs adjust quickly and will be settled and comfortable; doing very well within an hour or two. I will give them so much attention and love the first couple days to make sure it is a pleasant and enjoyable experience for them. This is also important as everything the mother feels causes things to happen inside her body that can affect the babies. The less stress and the more relaxed she is, the better it is for babies. So, it is very important that the guardian home not make the transition difficult for the dog. If they act upset or nervous or sad about leaving her, she will feel that even more greatly and we need to make sure that doesn't happen.

### **What happens during pregnancy and what do I have to do differently with the dog?**

Pregnancy is actually very easy. I have a list of what happens each week during the development of puppies, and I give that to our guardian homes at the time we begin breeding. The dog may act a little more tired, or not eat normally for a few weeks. The last couple weeks of pregnancy she is usually becoming more hungry and sleeps more as time progresses. Otherwise, normal activity is typical and it is important to continue with walking the dog right up to the end. This helps during delivery. Being in shape is always best. Normal play and romping and running during the first half of pregnancy is great. After that, we limit activity to walks on a leash and no ball chasing type of activities.

No chemicals may be given during pregnancy. We have to be notified immediately of any illness or injury so we can be involved in determining how she is treated.

### **What happens if the puppy gets sick or injured while in the guardian home's care?**

While the dog is in guardian's care and home, any illness or injury that happens is their financial responsibility. We must be involved in treatment plans and know what is going on and determining medications, but the family is responsible for those expenses. Health insurance is recommended during her breeding years. This insurance is for your protection because these dogs are extremely valuable as breeders.

### **What expenses do the guardians pay for and what things does the breeder pay for?**

The guardian home pays for any normal care items. Food, dishes, leashes, beds, normal vaccinations or wormings, flea meds, heartworm meds, toys, grooming needs etc. If the dog needs meds due to worms, illness, infection or anything unrelated to pregnancy, it is the guardian's responsibility to pay for those expenses.

We pay for all expenses related to health testing for breeding purposes, all breeding expenses and litter expenses.

### **How many litters do you usually breed before retiring the dog?**

I am going to contract for five litters. I may only breed four or two, or one, but I have the option of five. I am concerned for the well-being of my program dogs. If I find that the girl has problems

with deliveries or it would be unhealthy for them to breed again, I will stop the breeding program with her and she will be yours.

### **Who pays for the spay surgery once she is retired?**

I pay for the spay surgery after the girl has had time to recover from the last litter and have her hormone levels return to normal. This is usually about 2 months after puppies are weaned. I pay up to \$300 for the surgery, so if you choose a vet that charges an amount that is more than the average I've found throughout Michigan, be aware you'll be paying the difference. The average spay fee is between \$125 and \$175, but some vets charge as much as \$400.

### **What happens if the dog doesn't pass a health test like you want them to for becoming a breeding dog?**

At this stage in my business, I am planning on placing puppies in their guardian home before the testing is done. I am very careful to know the lines I work with, and it's not typical to have a health test come back so poorly that I have been unable to use the dog as a breeding dog. Remember, that breeding quality and pet quality are two different things. Just because a dog may not be the best breeding candidate doesn't mean they aren't the perfect pet. Most of the testing I do is very specific, and we have already thoroughly screened the line and health testing of parent dogs, so it's not likely I'll encounter a problem that would cause us to say I can't breed with that dog.

However, the biggest problem with placing puppies early is that if the girl were to have borderline tests and I've decided not to use her in our breeding program, it makes financial sense for us to sell her as a pet. We recognize the hardship on the family and the dog if we were to have to sell the puppy. If the guardian does not want to give up their pet and a dog is not utilized as a breeding dog for ANY reason by the time they are 2 years of age, the guardian home would be responsible to pay \$1,000. In some cases we might waive all fees based on our working knowledge of our guardian family.

### **What are the grooming requirements and do you want us to keep the dog clipped a certain way?**

We ask that families keep the dog groomed according to their breed standard.

We do require that the dog be kept groomed and matt free. If you are unable to keep the coat in good shape yourself, you are required to use a groomer to do so. If the dog is brought to us with a matted coat, or a coat that is in bad shape, we have the right to take them in to our own groomer and have them shaved down or worked on, but you will be responsible to reimburse us for that expense before the dog returns to you. Guardian dogs are ambassadors for our program. It is important that they are maintained and not matted and in bad shape.