

Blackforest Belgian Sheepdogs®

MARION & HARTMUT STARK • COMPANION, PERFORMANCE & SHOW HOMES

Welcome to Your Puppy Package

Congratulations on welcoming a Blackforest Belgian Sheepdog into your home and heart! This guide is designed to make the transition as smooth as possible for both you and your new puppy during these crucial first weeks.

1. Puppy Pick-Up Checklist

To ensure a safe and comfortable journey home, please bring the following items with you to the breeder's location for in-person pick-up:

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| ☐ Hard-sided Travel Crate: Secured properly in your vehicle for the drive home. | ☐ Bottled Water & Collapsible Bowl: Offering familiar water helps avoid stress-induced stomach upset. |
| ☐ Absorbent Towels/Puppy Pads: For lining the travel crate in case of motion sickness or accidents. | ☐ Cleaning Supplies: Paper towels, wet wipes, and plastic bags for disposal. |
| ☐ Leash & Collar / Harness: A small, adjustable collar and a standard 6-foot flat leash (no retractable leashes). | ☐ A Companion (Highly Recommended): To comfort the puppy while you drive. |

2. The First 48 Hours

The first 48 hours in a new home are a profound transition for a young puppy. They are leaving their mother, littermates, and the only environment they have ever known.

- **Keep it Quiet & Calm:** Limit visitors, loud noises, and excessive handling. Allow your puppy time to explore their immediate environment at their own pace.
- **Establish a Routine Immediately:** Take the puppy to their designated outdoor potty spot right out of the car, immediately after waking up, after eating, and after play sessions.
- **Potty Training Execution:** When it is time for a potty break, take the puppy directly out of the crate and *carry it* to its designated place. Do not let it walk around on the way out, as this frequently triggers accidents.

- **Bedtime Strategy:** Keep the crate close to your bed during the first few nights so they can hear and smell you, which eases anxiety. Expect some whimpering; quiet comfort is fine, but avoid taking them into bed as a reaction to crying.

3. Mental Stimulation & Toy Management

Belgian Sheepdogs are exceptionally intelligent, active, and working-oriented dogs. Providing for their psychological needs is just as vital as managing their physical exercise.

- **Interactive Chew Toys:** Supply your puppy with plenty of safe chew toys and classic stuffed **Kongs** to provide an appropriate outlet for their natural chewing instincts and to aid during teething.
- **Cognitive Enrichment:** Incorporate mental challenges, such as **Nina Ottosson puzzle games**. Engaging their brain with these problem-solving toys will satisfy their work drive and make them equally tired in addition to regular walks and physical play.
- **Tennis Ball Warning (Not Recommended):** Standard tennis balls are highly discouraged for your puppy. The abrasive felt fabric acts like sandpaper, picking up dirt and systematically ruining the protective enamel of their teeth over time. Additionally, the fabric easily peels off, presenting a severe choking and gastrointestinal blockage hazard.

4. Immunization Safety & Socialization Strategy

Protecting your puppy from highly contagious canine pathogens while simultaneously providing vital socialization is a balancing act. Until your puppy is fully vaccinated, strict environmental care must be maintained.

High-Risk Zones (Strictly Avoid): Do not allow your puppy to walk on the ground or play in public areas where unknown dogs do their business, including **dog parks, rest stops, public grass verges, or inside pet stores**. Pathogens like Parvovirus can persist in environments for incredibly long periods.

Safe and Intentional Socialization Options:

- **Controlled Public Outings:** To expose them to sights and sounds safely, you can take them to places like Home Depot. Use a standard shopping cart lined with a heavy, waterproof pad. Be attentive, as these environments can sometimes become overwhelming for a young puppy.
- **Selective Playmates:** Only allow your puppy to socialize and play with healthy dogs that are **their own size** and whose vaccination histories are fully verified by owners you trust.
- **The Puppy Culture Program:** We strongly encourage our owners to explore and utilize the **Puppy Culture Program** (available at www.puppyculture.com). This program offers science-backed, structured behavioral development protocols that beautifully continue the foundational socialization and enrichment training we started here.

5. Nutritional Guidelines & Feeding Schedule

Maintaining continuity in your puppy's diet is critical to preventing gastrointestinal distress. Your puppy has been raised on a high-quality formula designed for steady, healthy structural development.

Diet Specification: Feed exclusively **Purina Pro Plan Puppy Food - Chicken & Rice Formula**.

MEAL	TIME FRAME	INSTRUCTIONS
Morning Meal	6:00 AM – 7:30 AM	Measure exact portions as specified by age; serve dry or slightly moistened with warm water.
Mid-Day Meal	12:00 PM – 1:30 PM	Ensure meal is given mid-day to distribute caloric intake evenly.
Evening Meal	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Pick up water 2 hours before final bedtime to assist with overnight house training.

Crate Association Feeding Rule: We highly recommend **feeding all meals inside the crate**. Serving food exclusively in their den associates the crate with a highly positive, rewarding experience, drastically reducing crate anxiety and fostering a strong sense of security.

PROBIOTICS & MATURATION ADJUSTMENTS

From 2 to 6–12 Months: Add a daily high-quality probiotic such as **Purina FortiFlora** or **Nature's Pharmacy Daily Balance** to their food. This supports immune health and stabilization during environmental changes and vaccination cycles.

Transition to Adult Food: Once your puppy reaches physical maturity (typically between 6 to 12 months, based on growth assessment), systematically transition them to a regular, high-quality **26/16 adult formula** (26% Protein, 16% Fat) to maintain optimal working/athletic condition.

6. Crate Training & Management

A crate is not a tool for punishment; it is a secure den that satisfies a dog's natural instinct for safety and aids significantly in housebreaking.

- **Crate Size:** We recommend a **30" or 36" wire crate with a divider**. Using a divider allows you to adjust the living space to match your puppy's current size, preventing them from utilizing one side as a bathroom and the other as a bed as they grow.

- **Exercise Pens (X-Pens):** Setting up an exercise pen attached to or surrounding the crate is highly recommended. It creates a safe, controlled zone for play, prevents destructive chewing, and ensures the puppy's absolute safety when you cannot supervise them directly.

7. Mandatory 72-Hour Veterinary Check

Critical Contractual Requirement: Per your purchase agreement, you must arrange a wellness examination with a licensed veterinarian within **72 hours of picking up your puppy**.

This initial visit establishes a relationship with your vet, confirms the baseline physical health of your puppy upon transfer, and ensures your contract's health guarantees remain fully valid. Please bring all vaccination records provided by us to this appointment.

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