

Basenji Breeders Answer the Question:

What advice do you have for a new basenji breeder getting started?

"The Basenji" has had a series of articles interviewing Basenji breeders. The answers from many breeders to one particular question might help you get started. Articles reprinted with permission from "The Basenji."

Damara Bolté, Reveille since 1955. *Interview appeared March/April 2006*

Go slowly and LEARN all you can. Don't be too subjective. Kennel blindness can be a real affliction.

Marvin Wallis, Zande Basenjjs since 1956. *Interview appeared September/October 2006.*

Don't rush into things! Study the standard and every example of the breed you can. Ask questions (but beware, some breeders may not tell you where the dog is lacking). Then, choose your breeder and buy the best animal you can afford. Check carefully into the background of prospective mates for your dog/bitch – health problems in animal or its ancestors, faults, good points, temperament and see if you can see some of their ancestors and offspring. Then ask yourself, "Will it improve what I have?"

Mia Lowbeer & Monica Massih, Yulara Basenjjs since 1960. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" November/December 2007.*

Ask questions. Ask several breeders and also talk to breeders of other breeds. We learn a lot that way. Don't just start with the dog you have, try to get a very good breeding bitch from a good producing line.

Carol Webb, Kazor Basenjjs since 1962. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" January/February 2007.*

Buy the very best bitch you can get your hands on. Also observe with the standard in mind. Make up your mind and don't just go with the current winner as they are sometimes not the best from a breeding standpoint or at least for your bitch. Breeding is harder than when I started with the health problems often stopping a breeding I feel will be outstanding. Perhaps soon that won't be as big a problem as it is now.

Jo Bradshaw, Casa de Viento Basenjjs since 1965. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" July/August 2008..*

Do a lot of research on the Basenji breed. Find all of the current breeders in your area and go talk to them asking all kinds of questions about health, structure and movement. Read books on how dogs are supposed to move. Join BCOA. Go to local dog shows and talk to dog people other than the Basenji people. Find out the reputations of the Basenji breeders. Then, when you really, really feel right about a breeder, buy the very best bitch from that breeder that you can afford! Remember that it took a lot of blood, sweat, tears and money to get that bitch here. It will take a lot of those same qualities on your part to make her a champion.

Mary Lou Kenworthy, Kenset Basenjjs since 1967. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" January/February 2009.*

Study the history of the breed and look at pictures of the early Basenjjs. Knowing the breeds origin and purpose will help you to understand the Standard for the breed. Study the Standard carefully and often. Look at many different Basenjjs and see if they relate to the Standard. Not all the Basenjjs that are winning in the ring are correct to the Standard. Don't be afraid to use your own judgment. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Listen carefully to everyone but believe no one; digest everything you hear and then decide for yourself what is correct. Don't form such hard opinions that you cannot change them after you have gained more knowledge. Form a picture in your mind of the ideal Basenji based on the Standard. Study pedigrees to find what lines are producing your ideal Basenji's type. That will be a good place to start. Be prepared to be responsible for everything you breed.

Major Al Braun, Henty P'Kenya Basenjjs since 1970. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" May/June 2006*

I over-simplify, but it's still good advice. Find a mate for your Basenji that is healthy and is strong in desired characteristics where your dog may be weak.

Connie Paulsen, Khanis Basenjjs since 1965. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" September/October 2007.*

I think watching and listening to the older/more experienced breeder is worth a lot. Ask questions, and listen to what they say. If you ask lots of different people, you are going to get lots of different answers, so I think your best bet is to pick someone that has the type of dog you like, and is a person you like and are compatible with, and watch them and let them help you. Everyone has a different idea of what is the perfect dog – after all there isn't one yet, so what I tell you is going to be different from what someone else tells you.

One last point, just because you have pointed or finished your dog, doesn't mean it should be bred. Lots of dogs that are finished are not worthy of being bred. And, in retrospect, there are dogs that are not finished that are worthy of being in a breeding program. In this day and age with the health problems that we have in our breed, if you are going to breed you should be health testing your breeding stock and the resulting puppies (in my opinion.)

Doreen Duffin, Makuba Basenjjs since 1969. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" March/April 2007.*

Read as much as you can. Talk to good breeders – not only Basenji breeders. You will get lots of different opinions, but then it is up to you to sort things out for yourself. Watch plenty of dogs at shows, once again, not only Basenjjs. Differentiate between the good ones and the not so good ones, and try to develop an eye for a good dog. Some people are lucky and are born with a good eye, but I feel that if one studies enough, one can develop it too.

Linda Ehlers, Jerlin Basenjjs since 1970. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" March/April/May/June 2008.*

Constantly study the standard. Contact many reputable, established breeders throughout the country to get their input. Be prepared to hold onto puppies that do not sell. Be prepared to take your puppies back when the new homes do not work out **MY MAIN ADVICE TO NEW BREEDERS IS TO TAKE YOUR TIME!!!** Do not over breed in hopes that you will X number of champions within a certain time period. I have heard rumoured that "in five years, I want to be where so-and-so-long-time breeder' is." It does not work that way. Most long-established well-known breeders paid their dues and gained their reputations over many, many years.

Susan Kamen Marsicano, Apu Basenjjs since 1970. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" May/June 2007..*

Don't breed every year. Give what you do time to mellow. Allow time for you to get some new data. Health test, health test, health test. No excuse to breed a dog who has not had a hip x-ray, or Is not CERF'd or which has not been thyroid tested. It's easy to test patellas too. There is no excuse to breed from a dog that is not mentally stable, no matter how lovely. Find a mentor to understand the dogs in the pedigree. Build a pedigree of long-lived (16 years), friendly, pretty dogs. If they can win in the show ring, that is an added Mitzvah.

Having been out of the USA for a few years, I'm not too familiar with the newest trends in the breed. As always what I would pay attention to is the whole dog avoiding too much involvement in just the bits and pieces...the basic structure of the dog as well as head, coat and correct temperament. Remember to breed to the standard not be swayed by what is currently impressive and winning.

Over the years I developed a picture of the whole basenji type in my head and it includes a well-built dog as the standard describes it for me. Keeping track of all those things and being concerned with health makes breeding an interesting puzzle and a large responsibility.

Susan Coe, Akuaba Basenjjs since 1971. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji"*

Patience! It seems to me that those expecting instant results and gratification are probably going to be disappointed. Joining local and national breed clubs helps put one in contact with other fanciers. Reading the breed magazines and books as well as joining internet chat groups may help. One must, of course, take what one reads in literature or on the internet with a grain of salt. We found that making home movies of our dogs really helped us. Jon's favourite movie is me running backward getting the pups to gait finishing with me falling into a hole the dogs had dug. We could watch the dog move over and over, often studying them frame by frame. It is difficult to keep track of what the feet are doing, the lines (angles) of the legs as they move, the head carriage, whether the neck has a good arch or if it just goes straight, too bluntly into the body and watching for a level topline.

A must attend is the national specialty each year where new and experienced breeders can see what is going on with others from across the country. I felt so strongly about it that I was at the first one in 1979 right on through 2002. For a number of years it was Ovide Varin, Loretta Kelley and I who had never missed then the other two couldn't make it and I was the only person who

had come every time. It felt quite strange that first year I couldn't come. What a lot of dogs I saw and other breeders I learned about over those many trips. Besides a learning experience national specialties can be great fun. I remember Jane Williams meeting me at the airport in her VW Beetle and us squeezing 4 basenjis, an exercise pen, luggage, dog supplies and two people into it for the national and two all-breed show in Pensacola, Florida. I remember Judge Annie Clark glaring at me and my mates at the national in Seattle as we were just having way too much loud fun ringside. Imagine that now Chuck Bagnell is a judge and surely he was the ringleader with stories in that rowdy group...what a time.

I usually suggest that one buy a male basenji to start in the breed. You're right; we didn't start with a male. What we started with were two mediocre females and had we realized we were going to breed, we certainly could have selected better breeding stock. As I said, it seems we had to learn things the hard way!

With the first pup, again, you need patience to allow the pup to grow up...not all dogs are going to be puppy champions and that is sometimes a good thing. The quick maturing pups are not always the best pups when they finally fill out at three years old. The first basenji should be the "learner" dog who one enjoys, who gets one out to meet many breeders and to learn more about the breed before obtaining the first bitch. Finding the right first bitch is by far more important for the beginner who wants to breed good dogs and a bit of knowledge can be very useful in deciding where to go for the that first bitch.

I can tell you one thing for sure: You can read every book, study every video, talk to everyone, look up old pedigrees and make proposed future pedigrees for generations but once you do take the plunge you can't expect things to turn out as you planned. Flexibility, patience and a sense of adventure is required to breed dogs. Breeding and showing dogs always seems to be some sort of balance between satisfaction, disappointment, thrills and heartbreak. One has to be able to deal with all those phases to last in any breed.

Sue Kite, Klassic Basenjis since 1972. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" May/June 2010*

Don't be in a big hurry to "know it all." It takes a lot of time to "get it," so talk to everyone you can and learn as much as possible. Not everyone agrees, but get lots of opinions and then go back to the book, develop what is important to you, and if you are starting a breeding program, learn as much

as you can about what you have, what you need, and where you can go to get it.

There is no perfect dog, but strive for the best you can breed.

John Forbes, Baagna Basenjis since 1973. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" November/December 2006.*

Talk to lots of breeders and form your own opinion, but never be afraid to ask for help. When you breed a bitch, make sure the bitch is worthy of the breed. You need a good bitch, stud dogs are not able to produce wonderful, from ordinary bitches. Remember you cannot blame all the faults on one parent.

Sandra L Bridges and Penelope C Inan, Jato Basenjis since 1973. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" September/October 2008.*

Firstly, study the *history* of the breed. Find a really GOOD seminar on canine structure and movement; attend and *listen*. Purchase or borrow videos of BCOA National Specialties from past decades, then study them in stop and step motion. Acquire or visit with every back issue of "*The Basenji*" magazine (starting with the sixties) and become familiar with many different breeders and the dogs each one produced. Look at how they produced them, i.e. look at pedigrees and pictures of the dogs those breeders used in their breeding programs. The result of all this study should be that you formulate your idea of the correct Basenji, and that idea will then be based on *fact*, rather than just what the breeder you bought your first dog from told you.

Then, buy the best bitch you can from one of the Australian breeders (where proper heads are still to be found), and breed her to a stud from one of the few Basenji breeders left in the U.S. with lines that have preserved correct type in addition to their quest for health. Finally, select carefully only those puppies that reflect your ideal to put in the ring. Don't rely on the judges to decide what is and isn't a show dog; it is YOUR job to choose the right puppies and then show them with pride and conviction. A breeder friend once remarked to Sandy while she was in the ring during Best of Breed with WB (winners bitch), "Sandy, you always have such pretty bitches!" Her reply, "Only the ones you see!" Not ALL Jato puppies were "show" puppies. We tried to show only those that conformed to our idea of the correct Basenji. In real estate, the three PRIME issues are location, location, and location. In breeding, it's very like; only it must be SELECTION, SELECTION and SELECTION.

You must first *select* a good bitch, then again *select* the right mate for her and, finally, *select* the right puppies from your litters. Selection is often the

difference between real success and just “showing dogs.” We have known breeders who actually kept and showed the pets from their litters, while placing the superior dogs in pet homes. It’s so easy to be caught up in the current fads and fall for the “flying” puppy. Basenjjs were *supposed* to FLY, they FLOAT!! You need to look for effortless movement, which is the result of balance and moderation in structure combined with good conditioning.

Linda Stilwell, Stilwell Basenjjs since 1974. *Interview appeared in “The Basenji” September/October 2010.*

Advice for prospective breeders? Lots! There is much to be considered before undertaking a breeding program. First of all, consider the breed. The Basenji is truly a unique dog and cannot be likened to any other breed. Not always easy to live with, they are thinkers (and in many cases...stinkers!) Many will scoff at that statement, but I’ve lived with these dogs for 36 years and have been on the losing end of their considered opinions more times than I care to admit. They are, by turns, charming, devious, cunning, ingratiating, stubborn and compliant when they wish to be. They are not going to fit seamlessly into everyone’s life.

The next big thing to consider is where you want to GO with a breeding program. A breeding should never be planned without knowing the next step you are going to take. You should have done enough research to be able to plot the next breeding (for a puppy you keep) and so forth and so on. You should have a clear picture of what you want to accomplish with your program.

The last and probably the most important thing to consider is placement of your puppies. Selling/placing puppies is a serious responsibility. You must keep in mind that these puppies that you brought into the world are going to be totally dependent on the people you send them home with. Heavy? You bet! It takes a lot of homework.

Find a mentor, someone you trust, who will help guide you in the direction you want to go, whether this be for breeding, showing, lure coursing, agility, obedience or other dog activities. Seek out someone knowledgeable in the sport you’re interested in and learn from them.

Bryan and Laurie Gregory, Jumoke Basenjjs and Quita Basenjjs since 1981. *Interview appeared in “The Basenji” November/December 2008.*

Bryan: Start by breeding the best possible basenji you can obtain. I generally grade the overall impression of a basenji as poor, below average, average, above average, and excellent quality. The average basenji often earns a

championship in due time; below-average basenjis struggle to earn the title. Those new to the basenji fancy usually start with an average basenji. Established breeders generally reserve their best for themselves or for those with whom the breeder has a confident relationship. Owners new to breeding basenjis should carefully evaluate the basenjis that they are planning to breed. Seek a consultation with several established breeders who have a proven history. It is often a better choice to purchase or lease an above-average or excellent basenji than to breed an average basenji. Exceptional basenjis are produced generally by exceptional parents.

Do not be lured into the “I can fix that fault by breeding to...” mentality. Many of the basenji’s characteristic traits and good movement/structure are recessive. If you do not see the trait or movement/structure expressed in the basenji you are breeding, there is a good chance that specific dog will not be able to produce it, regardless of the breeding pair. It can take several generations of breeding to fix that fault or refine a trait.

Have a multi-generation breeding plan. Simply breeding from one generation to another is a hit-and-miss scenario, and the odds are against you.

Read. There are many good books on the art of breeding dogs.

Laurie: The advice I would give to a new breeder includes all of the clichés you have already heard: Study the breed. Study movement and structure. Ask questions. Talk to the breeder of your own dog. Find out what was the original goal of breeding those parents (improving what trait) and whether or not that goal was achieved. Look at the grandparents. Get involved in your local club. Take your time. Recognize that it takes time and practice to develop an eye for the dogs.

Linda Pence, Baruh Basenjis since 1981. *Interview appeared in “The Basenji” July/August 2007.*

Quality needs to exceed quantity. A good brood bitch is worth her weight in gold and **HEALTHY DOGS CAN WIN!**

Jackie Jones, Dragnquest Basenjis since 1985. *Interview appeared in “The Basenji” November/December 2010.*

Do your homework and put in the time to know your breed, its standard, and have a strong mentor who can guide you the entire way. Be prepared to put in long hours before, during, and after pregnancy. Puppies are very time and work intensive. And most of all, remember that you are responsible for those babies their entire lives, be that one day or twelve years. So be in a situation that you can take them back and make the hard decisions, if necessary.

Stella Sapios, Astarte Basenjjs since 1986. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" January/February 2012*

Do your homework and get a mentor that you respect. Breed for what is important for you, and never forget good health. Test for whatever you can to produce healthy offspring. Above all, remember that these dogs are social dogs and want human companionship. I also encourage people to spay/neuter and rehome dogs once they are done in the ring and/or are no longer needed in your breeding program. This way they can become part of a loving family home and not have to live their life out in a kennel.

Darlene "Dee" Lowitt, My-Tym Basenjjs since 1986. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" January/February 2008.*

Study the breed standard and visualize what this represents in your mind. Look for consistency in breeders and what they represent in your mind's eye to the standard, go to shows and judge in your mind as well, see how you do in comparison to the judge, observe other breeds, as well, and see how you do, get acquainted with breeders whose dogs you admire. Ask lots of questions and, above all – LISTEN. You will never know too much, so don't talk and act like – just listen.

Gale Whitehurst, UnderCover Basenjjs since 1986. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji"*

Don't be in a rush to breed. Find a good breeder in your area and shadow him/her for a year before you even think of buying a puppy, much less breeding a bitch. Most reputable breeders won't sell an unfinished bitch on anything but limited registration unless you have shown dogs before – doesn't necessarily have to be a basenji. Many people think they want to show a dog, or think their kid wants a junior's dog, or even think they are smart enough to own a basenji, only to find out later that it costs too much, or their kid has gotten involved with football, or they can't handle a basenji. I know I got burned too many times early in my career and bought too many puppies with UnderCover in their pedigrees to be too trusting of anyone without a bonafide reference. However, everyone has to start somewhere, and if you are willing to take the time to visit breeders in your area and find which one clicks with your personality, most breeders would be happy to sell or to co-own a quality bitch with a known quantity. I don't recommend breeding a dog before her third heat cycle, and for most basenjjs that's pushing 3 years old. That gives you enough time to establish a relationship, show your bitch (hopefully to her championship), have your bitch health tested, and evaluate stud dogs to compliment your bitch. Don't look for a

name in a stud dog. Thoroughly dissect your bitch according to the standard and honestly evaluate her good points AND HER BAD. No basenji is perfect, and if you need smaller ears, a higher tail set, or more wrinkle look for those qualities in your stud dog. Best advice I can give: is REMAIN CALM; do not invite the neighbors or your best friend on the street to the whelping; don't invite any other dogs in the house to the event, either; respect the bitch. Remember basenji bitches have been having babies for centuries, but they much prefer a calm, reassuring voice to a nervous Nelly or an audience.

Katie Campbell, Taji Basenjjs since 1992. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" November/December 2009 and January/February 2010*

Learn patience. Learn patience. And did I mention learn patience? – Because there is no short cut.

There is no easy route to long term success; there is no pre-packaged "formula" to become a respected breeder in less than 10 years' time. It just doesn't happen. Sure, any bona fide, early success will be glanced at by many, but you cannot prove that your talent supercedes your luck until you can prove that you can be successful over and over again in a variety of innovative ways. We've all been there, so we all know how you feel, but really you can't beat the clock. If you're actually talented (and frankly, not everyone who breeds "responsibly" is actually "talented"), you will learn from the mistakes and success of others as well as your own. You will learn not to ridicule others who have purpose that may differ from yours, especially publicly; you never know what you might desperately need in the future that may be fruit in the hands of someone you once condemned because you didn't understand his/her long-term plan at the time.

Cindy Russell, C-Quest Basenjjs since 1993. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" July/August 2010*

Take advantage of opportunities to observe lots of Basenjjs. Attend the National Specialty, affiliated club specialties. Train your eye to look for quality. Look for virtues before flaws and let the standard be your guide.

Pam Geoffroy & Sheila Lund, Eldorado Basenjjs since 1993. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" July/August 2009.*

Our advice to new breeders getting started is to do a lot of research and find a breeder who is willing to mentor you. Attend as many dog shows as you can, and decide what appeals to you. Once you have an idea of what you like in a basenji, buy the best stock you can find. It is a lot easier to breed from

quality dogs, than it is to try and breed up to quality. Know your dog's virtues, so you don't lose them. Always remember, not everything can be fixed in one breeding, therefore always strive to improve on a particular feature with each generation.

Russella Bowen, Jokuba Basenjjs since 1995. *Interview appeared in "The Basenji" January/February 2010.*

Read the standard, interpret the standard, and paint a picture in your head of your interpretation. Study photos and pedigrees of the old dogs in the magazines and the Zande Pedigree Website. Learn why dogs look the way they do. Stick to your vision regardless of what is winning. DO NOT breed to a dog because it is winning. Breed to the dog that best complements your breeding program and the bitch you are breeding. Be patient; it takes time to put pieces of dogs together, one generation after another. Always breed forward and don't stay stagnant. I am not a fan of repeat breedings, they don't contribute anything new to your breeding program or the gene pool and you aren't moving forward. It takes confidence to try something different. Plan your breedings in advance. Cindy, Kristen and I talk for hours about hypotheticals and generations down the road. Surround yourself with a good team!

MOST IMPORTANTLY, be responsible for your pups. Place the pets in great homes and be willing to take them back at any time for whatever reason!