

Halloween and Dogs

Halloween can be a festive and fun time for children and families. But for pets? Let's face it, it can be a downright nightmare. Forgo the stress and dangers this year by following these 10 easy tips.

1. Trick-or-treat candies are not for pets.

All forms of chocolate -- especially baking or dark chocolate -- can be dangerous, even lethal, for dogs and cats. Symptoms of chocolate poisoning may include vomiting, diarrhea, rapid breathing, increased heart rate, and seizures. Halloween candies containing the artificial sweetener xylitol can also be poisonous to dogs. Even small amounts of xylitol can cause a sudden drop in blood sugar and subsequent loss of coordination and seizures. And while xylitol toxicity in cats has yet to be established, it's better to be safe than sorry.

2. Don't leave pets out in the yard on Halloween.

Surprisingly, vicious pranksters have been known to tease, injure, steal, and even kill pets on Halloween night. Inexcusable? Yes! But preventable nonetheless.

3. Keep pets confined and away from the door.

Not only will your door be constantly opening and closing on Halloween, but strangers will be dressed in unusual costumes and yelling loudly for their candy. This, of course, is scary for our dogs. Dogs are especially territorial and may become anxious and growl at innocent trick-or-treaters. Putting your dog or cat in a secure room away from the front door will also prevent them from darting outside into the night ... a night when no one wants to be searching for a lost loved one.

4. Keep your outdoor cats inside several days before and several days after Halloween.

Black cats are especially at risk from pranks or other cruelty-related incidents. In fact, many shelters do not adopt out black cats during the month of October as a safety precaution.

5. Keep Halloween plants such as pumpkins and corn out of reach.

Although they are relatively nontoxic, such plants can induce *gastrointestinal* upset should your pets ingest them in large quantities. Intestinal blockage can even occur if large pieces are swallowed. And speaking of pumpkins ...

6. Don't keep lit pumpkins around pets.

Should they get too close, they run the risk of burning themselves or knocking it over and causing a fire.

7. Keep wires and electric light cords out of reach.

If chewed, your pet could cut himself or herself on shards of glass or plastic, or receive a possibly life-threatening electrical shock.

8. Don't dress your pet in a costume unless you know they'll love it.

If you do decide that Fido or Kitty needs a costume, make sure it isn't annoying or unsafe. It should not constrict movement, hearing, or the ability to breathe or bark and meow.

9. Try on pet costumes before the big night.

If they seem distressed, allergic, or show abnormal behavior, consider letting them go in their "birthday suit". Festive bandanas usually work for party poopers, too.

10. IDs, please!

If your dog or cat should escape and become lost, having the proper identification will increase the chances that they will be returned. Just make sure the information is up-to-date, even if your pet is microchipped.