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# How to have a more sustainable Halloween

These eco-friendly tips will minimize your carbon footprint from Halloween.

By [Julia Jacobo](#)

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The scariest part of Halloween may be the amount of waste left after the spooky celebrations.

Store-bought costumes are often worn once, before ending up in a landfill. Candy is also commonly thrown out due to preference or dietary restrictions and the non-recyclable wrappers contribute to millions of pounds of trash per year, experts told ABC News.

For Halloween 2024, Americans are expected to spend \$3.8 billion on costumes, \$3.8 billion on decorations and \$3.5 billion on candy, according to the [National Retail Federation](#).

However, there are ways to partake in the Halloween revelry while minimizing harm to the planet, according to experts.

Here's how to have a more sustainable Halloween:

## Rethink your costume

An astonishing number of Halloween costumes get thrown away every year, studies have shown. About 83% of Halloween costumes use non-recyclable oil-based plastics, which means they were likely destined for the landfill from their conception, according to a 2019 study by London-based environmental nonprofit [Hubbub](#).

Sourcing used costumes from older siblings, friends, neighbors and thrift stores is one of the most sustainable ways to dress up for Halloween, Lexy Silverstein, a sustainable fashion advocate, told ABC News.

Most Halloween costumes are made of oil-based, non-biodegradable materials like polyester, nylon, acrylic and spandex, Silverstein said.

"That's like dressing up in plastic bags," Silverstein said.



People shop for Halloween in Alhambra, Calif. on Oct. 18, 2019. Frederic J. Brown/AFP via Getty Images, FILE

Synthetic materials can take years -- even centuries -- to break down and can eventually end up in waterways, polluting marine ecosystems, Lea d'Auriol, founder of nonprofit Oceanic Global.

In addition, the chemicals used in face paint and cheap Halloween makeup can be toxic and seep into waterways when washed off, D'Auriol said.

Getting creative and making your own costume can also cut down an individual's carbon footprint when celebrating the holiday, Silverstein said. Even items lying around the house like bedding, sports equipment and winter accessories can serve as useful accessories for the perfect Halloween costume, the experts said. Choosing natural fibers such as 100% cotton options, hemp, silk and bamboo are also better for the planet, D'Auriol said.



Children's costumes are displayed for sale at a store in Chicago on Oct. 8, 2024. Laura Bargfeld/AP



A white T-shirt and leather jacket could be used to dress up as James Dean or Danny Zuko from "Grease," Silverstein said. A pair of overalls could be the making of a scarecrow, a farmer, or even Chucky from "Child's Play," she added.

For those who aren't fans of DIY, thrifting a costume or re-using an old one can be just as sustainable, according to [Keep America Beautiful](#), a community improvement nonprofit.

Even the vessel used to hold candy can be sustainable, the experts said. Ditch the plastic Halloween pail for a wicker basket, household bucket or pillowcase to carry the sweet stash.

"With a few small changes -- like choosing natural fabrics or second-hand finds -- we can dress up without dressing down the planet," Silverstein said.

## **Be mindful of the treats you hand out**

Another big way to reduce Halloween waste is by buying Halloween candy that has recyclable wrapping, since many single-use candy wrappers are not recyclable or even biodegradable, according to Keep America Beautiful.

Wrappings for single chocolates or bars of chocolate that are wrapped in 100% aluminum foil or single cardboard, like Junior Mints or Milk Duds are recyclable, according to the nonprofit.

Buying candy in bulk also reduces the number of individual wrappers making their way to landfills, according to Keep America Beautiful.

If store-bought treats are not imperative for the celebration, consider sustainable treats as well, according to Good On You, a platform that rates fashion and beauty brands for sustainability.



Decorative pumpkins filled with assorted Halloween chocolate candy. STOCK PHOTO/Adobe Stock

Some of the biggest candy manufacturers in the world are environmentally harmful due to the sheer amount of sugar, palm oil and cocoa beans required to make their products, which has contributed to

widespread deforestation and biodiversity loss, according to Good On You.

Sweets such as homemade vegan sugar cookies, homemade Rollos and peanut butter balls are a sustainable alternative to storebought treats, the platform said.

Households can also choose to hand out non-food, non-plastic items like crayons and stickers, the experts said.

## **Use seasonal, organic decorations**

Pumpkins are one of the most iconic symbols of the autumn season, but other seasonal food items such as gourds, squash, dried corn, husks and apples can also be used for decorating this season, according to Keep America Beautiful.

Dried flowers, twigs and leaves can also be used to "create a cozy autumn vibe," according to the nonprofit.

Once the season has passed, don't forget to compost Jack O' Lanterns and other organic decorations rather than sending them to a landfill, which will help to cut down methane emissions that originate from decomposing food in landfills, according to Keep America Beautiful.

Other items lying around the house could be repurposed for Halloween decorations as well, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

Stockings ruined by runs can be used to make spider webs. Packing material made of paint foam peanuts can be used to make worms. Clean styrofoam can be used to make Halloween masks. Cardboard boxes can be turned into tombstones, according to the WWF.



Halloween pumpkins and decorations outside a house. STOCK PHOTO/Adobe Stock

If you are inclined to buy Halloween-specific decorations, pick pieces that are good quality that can be used year after year, the experts said.



"Synthetic decorations like spider webs and foam tombstones are terrible," D'Auriol said. "We just don't have the infrastructure to recycle that again."

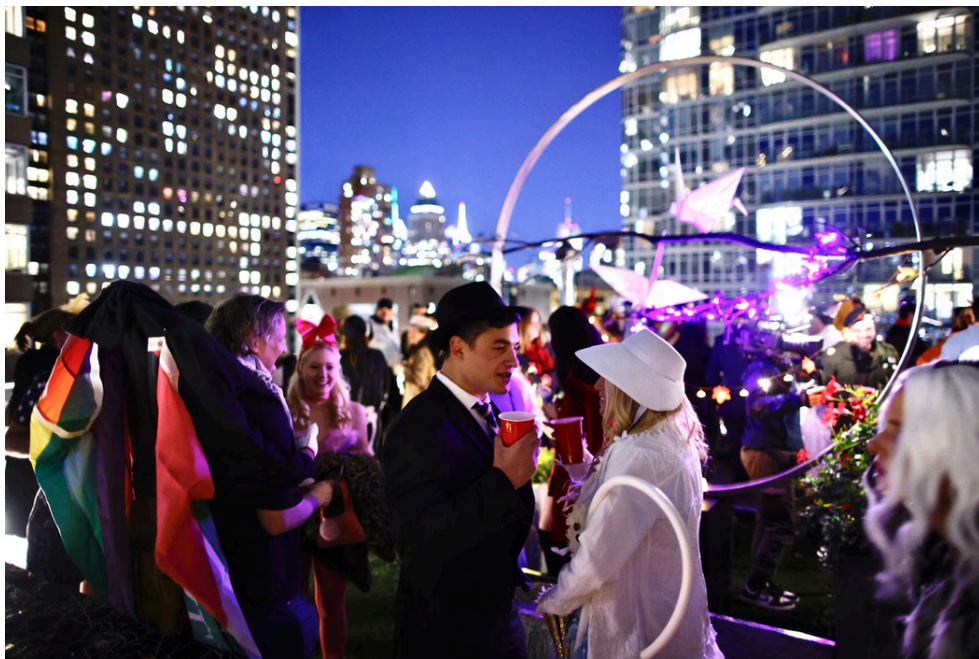
"Sustainable Halloween decor isn't just budget-friendly; it's unique," Silverstein said.

## Host an eco-friendly Halloween party

Sending digital invitations is one of the easiest ways to initially reduce the carbon footprint associated with Halloween celebrations, the experts said.

Sustainability can be a theme for your next Halloween get-together as well.

Hosts can encourage their guests to wear thrifted or homemade costumes, according to Keep America Beautiful.



People attend New York Young Republican Club's 6th annual rooftop MAGAWEEN party in New York, Oct. 26, 2024. Kena Betancur/AFP via Getty Images

D'Auriol also recommended avoiding single-use plastics like cups, plates and cutlery, she said.

Oceanic Global's [The Blue Standard](#), a solutions program, offers an event guide on how to create a plastic-free event, D'Auriol said.

Sourcing seasonal and local food -- to cut down on transportation-based emissions -- and choosing some plant-based options, which have a much lower carbon footprint than animal products, can also significantly cut down on emissions from parties, D'Auriol said.

The leftover filling from pumpkins used to make Jack O' Lanterns can also be upcycled to bake a pie, muffins or cookies, further eliminating waste, D'Auriol said.

Lastly, planning the Halloween carefully can help minimize food waste and methane emissions, which are about [25 times more potent](#) than carbon dioxide, the experts said. Whatever food scraps remain can be composted as well.

## Participate in post-Halloween cleanup events

The day after Halloween, the ground is often mired with litter from candy wrappers, decorations gone astray and wayward costume pieces, according to Keep America Beautiful.

"Those capes and witch hats don't just vanish after October 31st -- they stick around for decades, breaking down into microplastics and polluting our planet," Silverstein said.



Halloween pumpkins and decorations outside a house. STOCK PHOTO/Adobe Stock

Whether volunteering as an individual or participating in a community-based cleanup event, preventing the trash from ending up in waterways and neighborhood playgrounds is an impactful way to protect the environment and keep the holiday eco-friendly, the experts said.

Keep America Beautiful invites participants to take part in the Greatest American Cleanup by joining or organizing a local cleanup.