

## Safely Using Dog Costumes

**Prioritize safety when picking out and using a holiday costume for your dog.**

*Nikki Moustaki*

Pet stores begin to display doggie costumes as the holidays approach, and as we get into the spirit, we have difficulty resisting the array of pumpkin hats and little red Santa coats. Some dogs love getting dressed up — yes, they actually love it — probably because of the approval they get from their owners when they prance around in those reindeer antlers.

Other dogs don't. If you put a bow tie on Buddy or a tutu on Maggie, and scratching, pawing, or chewing ensues, your dog likely prefers to go au naturel. A clean, well-brushed fur coat makes a pretty nice costume all by itself.

If your dog does like to put on the dog, so to speak, remember that not all costumes are created equal. Make safety your first concern by looking for the kind of features used in children's clothing.

Be aware of loose and easily detachable items that make the costume cute but dangerous, says Bill Viscome, owner of Pampet USA, a dog clothing manufacturer. Things like bells and sequins, if not securely fastened, can be very hazardous. Usually, items that aren't childproof aren't dogproof. If you think your dog might chew and choke on it, don't buy it.

Pay just as much attention to comfort, too. Make sure the outfit and its accessories allow your dog to see and hear clearly. Also, buy the right size. Packages usually include measuring tips.

Fit is probably the most important thing to consider, Viscome says. If the item is binding or parts of the costume irritate the pet, the owner is wasting his money and risking injury to the pet. Usually, the dog's reaction will indicate whether he's comfortable. When you put that cute little hat on him, and he shakes his head and paws it, he doesn't like the fit, or like many dogs, just doesn't like something on his head.

Have fun during the holidays, but remember the costuming rule of thumb: If it's safe enough for little Timmy, it's probably safe enough for Lassie, but only if Lassie enjoys it, too.