

Keeping Pets Safe on Halloween

With a few precautions, pet owners can prevent their dogs from getting spooked.

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Being prepared is one way experts say that pet owners can keep cats and dogs safe on Halloween. Before dressing an animal in a costume, animal groups and trainers offer several guidelines.

Pet owners should think twice about dog costumes, according to dog training company Bark Busters. While some dogs might like being dressed up, it's wise to experiment first to see if a pet likes to be in costume. If an animal shows resistance, don't do it, they say.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals advises pet owners to be aware of Halloween-related products and activities that can be dangerous to cats and dogs. For example, some sweets can be toxic to pets. Candy wrappers, which a pet may want to play with, can be ingested and cause intestinal blockage and induce vomiting, the ASPCA says.

Another danger on Halloween is an increased potential for dog bites, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. If a dog is apprehensive about costumes and excited children, pet owners need to be aware and make preparations before Halloween to keep both dogs and children safe, says James Cook, AVMA president.

"If your dog gets nervous when the doorbell rings, put the dog in a place where it will feel safe," Cook says, such as a crate with a toy or a familiar room with the door closed.

The ASPCA offers the following trick-free Halloween tips: Decorations can be dangerous. Re-think placing candles in Jack-O-Lanterns. Pets can easily knock them over and start a fire. Use fake cobwebs sparingly outdoors. These may adversely affect pets and wildlife. Don't let pets chew or eat items like crepe paper streamers – these are often colored with water-soluble dyes that will discolor your pet's mouth and can cause upset stomach.

Careful with costumes. Make sure pet costumes do not limit an animal's movement, hearing, sight or ability to breathe or bark. Also check the costume for choking hazards. An alternative to dressing your pet from head to tail: a simple, festive Halloween bandana.

Treat your dog. Keep a supply of pet treats handy and reach for one before you open the door for trick-or-treaters. If your pets can sit calmly while the door is open, give them a treat.

Watch out for chocolate. Chocolate, especially baker's and dark chocolate is poisonous to dogs. So is the artificial sweetener xylitol. A small amount of xylitol sweetener can cause a sudden drop in blood sugar, which can lead to depression, lack of coordination and seizures. Symptoms of significant chocolate ingestion may include vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, and increased thirst, urination and heart rate, and even seizures.

In addition, pet owners are urged not to leave their animals outside. Double-check ID tags just in case.

Finally, provide your pets some extra love and attention to relieve them of Halloween stress.