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A green Halloween is very eek-o chic

By Tom Watson
Special to The Seattle Times

How do you turn a black-and-orange holiday into a green one?

Everything's going green these days, including holidays, but Halloween is a different creature. If we're not careful, our well-intentioned efforts to make Halloween green can seem like we're forcing eco-correctness on a holiday that celebrates devilish fun and outrageousness.

But plenty of opportunities exist for you to green-up All Hallows Eve without turning into the Halloween equivalent of the Grinch. These eek-o friendly tips will help you get your ghoul on.

Haunted wallets

Here's a scary thought: Americans will spend \$5.8 billion on Halloween this year, or an average of \$67 per person, according to the National Retail Federation.

With money tight for many folks these days, you need to get the biggest scream for your buck. So don't be tempted by those aisles full of Halloween stuff in the stores. Before buying any new Halloween-related product, ask yourself if anyone would miss it if you didn't buy it, or if you could substitute something you already have or could buy used.

Dressed to chill

Conjuring a costume for your kids or yourself from old clothes and other salvaged materials is one of the best ways to enjoy an eco-Halloween on a low budget.

Once you've plundered your own closets and attic, thrift stores will become your best friend. Many thrift-store chains such as Value Village and Goodwill offer special Halloween deals and activities. Fifteen Seattle-area Goodwill stores will even stay open extended hours next Saturday and Sunday,

Oct. 25-26, for Halloween shopping.

Thrift stores have become such Halloween destinations that the largest ones may get picked over, so haunt the smaller, independent, neighborhood thrift shops as well. If you can't decide who or what you want to be, an Internet search for "homemade Halloween costumes" should generate plenty of spooky ideas.

Candy quandary

Parents have agonized about Halloween candy for decades, mostly for health reasons. More recently, all the waste and packaging from Halloween candy have been identified as an environmental issue. If you don't feel good about giving out candy, or you just want to save money, you can simply opt out by keeping your front lights off on Halloween.

Especially if you don't get hordes of trick-or-treaters, consider giving out noncandy items such as colorful pencils, Halloween shoelaces or even those cool foreign coins left over from your last trip. The Green Halloween Web site, started last year by Issaquah mom Corey Colwell-Lipson, offers dozens of additional suggestions. Stay away from small plastic items that might be choking hazards for young children. Also avoid cheap kids' jewelry, since it may contain lead.

A few organic or "fair trade" candy options are available, online from Global Exchange for example, but they usually command a premium price.

Graveyard for treats

When your kids head out on their rounds, they don't need a special new bag or container. Find a used Halloween-themed bucket at the thrift store, or decorate an old pillow case. Kids usually love using pillow cases because they hold lots of candy.

After they get home with their booty, many kids are actually fine with quickly getting rid of the candy they don't like. Ask them to help you open the packages and put the reject candy in your food-scrap container. Food scraps can be placed in the yard-waste bin in most area cities.

Don't put candy in a backyard composting bin, since it takes too long to break down at the relatively low temperatures in those bins. Plastic candy wrappers cannot be recycled, but food-soiled paper packaging (such as boxes with chocolate residue on them) can go in with the food scraps.

Naturally creepy

When decorating, forgo the cheesy, imported-plastic skeletons, gravestones and all the rest. Those store-bought decorations are expensive, they may contain questionable chemicals in the plastic and they often fall apart before November. Consult Halloween crafts resources online to make your own distinctive decorations. If you must have creepy sound effects or electronic visuals, use rechargeable batteries for portable equipment.

Farmers markets offer locally grown pumpkins, winter squash, gourds, fall flowers and other terrific items for Halloween decorating. Several Seattle farmers markets feature pumpkin-decorating events for kids, including the Magnolia market today, the Columbia City market Wednesday and the Broadway and West Seattle markets Oct. 26.

And when the trick-or-treaters are just a happy, spooky memory, and your jack-o'-lantern starts to rot, you can toss him in with the food scraps, too.

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