

Halloween:

Seven Simple Steps to a Super Halloween Party

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All it takes is a “Boo” and a giggle and Halloween sky rockets to the top in a list of favorite holidays. The costumes, the spooky fun, the crafts, games, and of course the treats make this holiday perfect for throwing a party. Best of all, with a little imagination your party can be as spooky or tame as you want it to be and everyone will be guaranteed a good time.

There are several keys to a great party including:

- Invitations
- Decorations
- Music
- Food
- Games and activities
- Crafts
- Goodie Bags

In order to pull it all together, careful planning and organization are required. To make your party as easy as possible, we've broken down each facet of your party into suggestion, tips, and tools. Let's not waste any more time talking about the perfect Halloween party, let's get down to business.

Step One: The Invitations And Party Theme

What kind of party are you going to have? If you have little ones then a pumpkin theme or a cute and fun theme will be more appropriate. If you have older children then you can lean toward the spooky side with witches, werewolves, mummies and the like. Children in the middle, 8-11, find happy footing in the world of wizards, dragons, and all things magic.

Pumpkin Theme Party Invitations: Home made invitations with orange paper and black overlays. Scary, fancy, funny, and downright crazy pumpkin clip art can be found online. Use the clip art to create your own unique pumpkin themed invitations.

Taking a Walk on the Dark Side: Older children like scarier parties and you can have fun with the invitations. Mail a small box to attendees and inside it place a rubber rat, a rubber eyeball, or even a rubber severed finger with the details of the party details on a piece of paper inside. Not quite ready to get that gross? Consider sending an audio invitation by taping scary music and a creepy voice that invites your guests to a gruesome time they won't soon forget.

Magic Wonderland: Many children find themselves somewhere in between wanting to be scared and still clinging to their parents pant legs. Magic is the perfect solution.

Whether you venture into the world of knights, dragons, and wizards or actually into the world of illusions and magic tricks, the magic theme is a safe middle. Invitations can be wizard hats, spell books, or magicians' hats, easy to make with black construction paper and the details printed on back.

Other possible themes include:

- Egyptian Temple
- Spirits and Ghosties
- Pirates
- Scarecrows
- Or Silly Monsters

Once your theme is chosen and your invitations made and sent, it's time to move onto the decorations!

Step Two: Decorating For Your Party

The right decorations can make or break your party. Too scary and you'll have little ones crying to go home, not scary enough and the older kids will be bored. Here are a few suggestions for decorating an age appropriate party.

A Pumpkin Themed Party

What's better than walking into a home full of amazing pumpkins carved in all shapes, sizes and even colors? To decorate your home for a pumpkin themed party choose several pumpkins ranging in size from the small gourds perfect for tabletop use to the gigantic prize winning pumpkins perfect for starting the party at your doorstep.

Pumpkins even come in white, various shades of orange, and green. And you can find bumpy pumpkins for extra interest. Carve the majority of them either by using pumpkin stencils or by creating the faces yourself. Don't forget to leave enough pumpkins so that every guest can carve a pumpkin at the party and take it home.

Gross Out Party

For the party that is going to be complete with a terrifying haunted house the decorations can't be too over the top. Teenagers love to be scared and the decorations should set the tone. You can make your home resemble a mad scientist's laboratory complete with an examination table, a cart, beakers full of steaming liquid, and a control box.

Here's how:

The examination table is easily accomplished by placing a white table cloth over a long rectangular table. At the head of the table, place a large cardboard box covered in aluminum foil. Dials and buttons can be made with bottle caps, buttons, and plastic lids.

Run plastic tubing, bought at your local hardware store from holes in the box to a table nearby. On the table place several beakers, bowls, and jars filled with soapy water and food coloring. You can also use liquid nitrogen for a steamy effect. Take care to only let adults handle the liquid nitrogen!

To set the stage for a really disgusting party, place cooked spaghetti and doll heads or softened grapefruits in jars. Fill the jars with corn syrup and cap tightly. Let the kids dip their hands into a bowl of 'eyeballs' or peeled grapes. Let them stick their feet in a bucket of guts or cold spaghetti.

As children enter the party, don't forget to hang spider webs, scary masks – with or without a head attached, and other scary monsters. You can also use police tape to cover doors of rooms that are not available to guests and you can make a chalk outline of a body on the floor for a 'crime' themed party.

Magic Wonderland Party

Harry Potter fans will jump on board for this edgy but not too scary themed party. Wizards and warlocks will cast magic spells. Dim the lights, add stick on stars to the ceiling and walls, and create a bubbling cauldron with liquid nitrogen in the corner on a table.

Hosts and hostesses can dress as wizards with long flowing capes, wizard hats, and wands.

Suspend clouds from your ceiling, made of pillow stuffing or crepe paper, and hang bats from the clouds. Lightening bolts can hang from the ceiling or be taped to the walls. Old frames, or frames made from gold foil, can be hung on the walls over pictures found on the internet.

Outside your home, hang small lights from tree branches or bring a branch or two inside, hang them over your doorway and decorate them with the small lights to create a stunning entrance.

If you're looking for less wizard and more magician, consider replacing the cauldron with a magic hat and wand in the corner. A large cardboard box in the room can be decorated as the 'saw the person in half' magician's prop and a table of cards and other magic tricks for children to try out.

Lighted luminaries, placed up and away from children's hands, can add an eerie and magical glow to any party.

Of course no party is complete without some music to set the mood. Mood music can be found at your local library, online via download, and every Halloween scores of cds are released that are chock full of creepy sounds.

Step Three: What To Feed The Little Monsters

No party is complete without lots of good food, especially a Halloween party. Halloween is great because it allows you and your children to get really creative with the treats you offer. A simple cookie becomes a magical pumpkin, a popcorn ball becomes a scarecrow, and a hard candy sucker can be made to look like a severed finger or a scary spider.

Here are some great spooky treats to serve at your next Halloween party.

One favorite is worms in dirt. This can be accomplished by mixing up chocolate pudding, topping it with crumbled chocolate cookies and placing gummy worms inside. Simple, gross, and good!

For the more health conscious parent consider cooking up breaded strips of chicken, serving them as fingers or witches fingers, and dipping them in blood (ketchup). Sandwiches can be quartered, toothpicks can be placed through them to hold them together, and eyeballs or olives can be placed on the toothpick.

Spooky Honey Popcorn Balls

Ingredients:

- ½ cup honey
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 Tbs butter
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 5 cups popped popcorn

Directions:

1. Combine honey, sugar and 1 tablespoon butter in 2-quart microwave-safe container.
2. Covered with plastic wrap and cook in your microwave for 5-1/2 to 7 minutes.
3. Pour over warm popcorn and stir until popcorn is thoroughly coated.
4. Let mixture sit until cool enough to touch
5. Butter hands and shape popcorn into balls.

Pumpkin Muffins

Ingredients

- 1-1/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup buckwheat flour
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground pumpkin pie spice
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup canned unseasoned pumpkin
- 1/2 cup fat-free milk
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1/2 teaspoon orange peel
- 1/4 cup orange juice

Directions:

1. In a medium bowl combine the all-purpose flour, buckwheat flour, sugar, baking powder, pumpkin pie spice, and baking soda.
2. In another bowl combine the eggs, pumpkin, milk, oil, orange peel, and orange juice.
3. Add the egg mixture all at once to the flour mixture. Stir just until moistened (batter will be lumpy).
4. Spoon batter into the prepared muffin cups. Bake in a 400 degree oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until the muffins are light brown. Cool in muffin cups on a wire rack for 5 minutes. Remove from muffin cups; serve warm. Makes 12 muffins.

No party would be complete without a spooky beverage. Here is a great recipe that's lots of fun.

Ghoulish Punch

- 3 pints of grape juice
- 1 1/2 pints of club soda
- Mix together the grape juice and club soda and pour into a large bowl or cauldron.

To include a ghoulish quality add:

- Grapes that will look like eyes floating in the punch.
- Apples diced in small chunks will float and resemble teeth.
- Rubber gloves filled with water tied off and frozen. Iced hands will keep punch cold and add a creepy touch to the punch.

Step Four: Party Games And Activities To Get Your Ghoul On

Bobbing for Apples: The classic Halloween party game is bobbing for apples. To make it creepier, peel the apples and call it bobbing for brains or carve faces into them.

Bowls of Goo: Another classic is the “Guess What You’re Feeling” game where you fill various bowls with food items like peeled grapes and call them eyeballs, spaghetti becomes guts, and pumpkin guts are brains.

To add a competitive spin on the games add three marbles into each bowl of goo and challenge the kids to find the eyeballs with their feet!

Guessing Game: Fill a jar with candy corn and ask children to write down their guess on how many pieces of candy are in the jar. Winners get the jar!

Games to get them riled up!

- Scavenger hunts for creepy items. Print out a list ahead of time, or if the children are very young print out a list of pictures, and send the children around the house and yard searching for their items. Pair them up and the first team back wins a special prize.
- Have children move jello, popcorn, or even cotton balls from a bowl on one side of the room to a bowl on the other side of the room. The first team to fill their bowl wins. Tip: If you’re planning on doing this game with food like jello, which is tons of fun, make sure you do it outside so that you don’t end up with a slippery floor.
- Dance contest
- Make your own monster movie contest
- Pumpkin carving contest
- Haunted house (this involves a bit of preparation and consideration of the age of the attendees.) Choose a room or series of rooms to darken and decorate. Gather family members or neighbors to help out with the haunting. The following are some props that you can build yourself to make your haunted house the best one on the block:

- **Coffins, tombstones and walls** can all be created from cardboard boxes.
 - **Skeletons and bones** can be bought for less than \$10 at your local dollar store or Halloween specialty store. You can also make them with clay or paper mache.
 - **Monster cage** can be created easily with PVC pipe and cardboard boxes.
 - **Bats** and spiders can be made with paper, black socks, felt and much more. Cut out shapes and hang them with black thread or fishing line.
 - **Mazes** can be made from boxes and/or PVC piping and sheets. Mazes make it easy to create hiding places for scary props and people.
 - **Dinner anyone?** Create a meal fit for a monster by placing a stuffed mask on a small table (Severed head) and setting the table for a meal. You can even place a monster at the table ready to dine.
 - **Spooky pictures** can be created by buying cheap frames or making them yourself. You can place real heads behind the frames or print out scary pictures and frame them.
 - **Glow in the dark paint** creates a fantastic effect. You can also find glow in the dark stickers, chalk, and more.
 - **Hire a witch** or dress up a family member and invite them to stir their cauldron and cackle to their hearts content.
 - **Hidden effects offer great surprises.** You can hide props where people least expect them, like behind the bathroom door. You can stuff panty hose, place a shoe on them and have a leg sticking out of a closet or cupboard.
- Hay rides are also great events that take a little extra preparation. If you have the space and means to provide a hay ride, they can be a fantastic outdoor excursion. Of course you'll also need to have a plan B in the event of rain.

Games to wind them down:

- Halloween picture dictionary or charades
- Have the children make as many words as they can from Halloween themed words like Pumpkin Patch or Halloween Costume.
- Pop in a Halloween movie, dim the lights, and wake them up when it's time to go home.

Of course crafts are a great way to refocus the energy of your guests.

Step Five: Halloween Crafts

Masks and hats: Small children have tremendous fun making masks for Halloween. Find creative tools like feathers, glitter, ric rac, fabric scraps, pipe cleaners etc and watch the children's creativity soar. Masks can be made with paper plates or plastic milk jugs that have been cut in half and felt hats can be bought at your local craft store or local thrift shop. Allow children to make both hats and masks and then challenge them to put on a play with their new costumes.

Carving pumpkins: Allow children to choose from a variety of pumpkins. Make stencils available for children to choose from but also provide them the tools to design their own faces. Tools that they'll need are paper and pencils for designing. Safe carving tools can be found at your local hobby shop.

For the younger crowd, eliminate the carving aspect and make it a pumpkin decorating project. Simply provide them with an abundance of markers and watch them create!

Halloween candles: Halloween candles can be made by washing tin cans. Fill the cans with water and pop them in the freezer. Draw designs on a piece of paper and tape the designs to the cans of frozen water.

Using a hammer and a nail, make holes about 1/8 of an inch apart along the lines of the design. Remove the paper, run the cans under warm water to loosen and remove the ice, dry and decorate or paint as desired. When decorating is completed place sand in the bottom of the can to keep them from tipping over and add a small candle.

Step Six: Goodie Bags

No party is complete without a goodie bag full of fun stuff to take home. Excellent suggestions for a winning goodie bags are:

Glow in the dark goodie bag: Tattoos
Jewelry
Glow sticks
Stars

Monster goodie bag:

Vampire fangs
Wax teeth
Mirrors
Candy blood
Vampire toy

Magician goodie bag: Cards
Magic tricks
Magic wand
Spell books
Invisible ink

Pirate goodie bag:

Beads/necklaces
Chocolate coins
Seashells
Eye patch
Ring pop candy

Step Seven: Tips And Strategies For A Safe And Sane Party

Halloween parties can be fantastic fun but they can also be scary for some children, and adults. Here are some tips to keep everyone smiling:

- One of the best ways to determine how many people to invite to a party, and a great way to maintain consistency throughout the year is to, allow children to invite as many people as they are years old. For example, a five year old would invite five children and a fifteen year old would invite fifteen children.
- Allow parents of young children the opportunity to stay with their children at the party. This will make the children, and the parents feel more comfortable and it will provide you helpers as the children make their crafts and play their games.
- For the very young, consider hosting a party during the day. This helps to reduce the spookiness of the event and it also makes it easier for parents to manage their schedule.
- Close all doors to rooms where children aren't allowed to go. You can cover them with 'keep out' tape.
- If you're having the party outside or are dimming the lights inside, make sure to light paths to the bathroom and make sure there's enough light to be safe. Consider, handing out souvenir flash lights as your guests arrive.
- Always have a few games and snacks in your back pocket in the event of a party lull.
- Don't forget to take pictures or assign a party photographer. This is often a great job for dads or older siblings.
- If you're spooked about hosting a party by yourself, consider teaming up with another family. Divide up the tasks and plan a party that you and your children will remember!

Hopefully now you have wonderful ideas for your Halloween party swirling in your head and you're ready to begin planning. Best of luck and have a Happy Halloween!

Grandpa Richard also writes for the following blogs and websites ...

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