

Green Halloween is on a mission to make Halloween healthier

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[Delicious Living](#)

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It's downright scary: Halloween sales reached \$6.2 billion on 2010, with 36 million kids between ages 5 and 13 going door-to-door or filling treat bags at neighborhood parties and community events. That's a monster amount of candy—most of it filled with fake-food ingredients, sickly-sweet sugar or high fructose corn syrup, and eerie [lab-created colors](#) (we're looking at you, candy corn).

In 2006, Seattle mom Corey Colwell-Lipson started to turn the tables on this unhealthy juggernaut when she took a closer look at her kids' Halloween trick-or-treat haul. "The other moms and I were shocked that our kids were really excited about the things they got that were *not* conventional candy," she recalls, like 100 percent fruit leather, natural gum, and even non-food items like coins and pencils.

This got her thinking: Was neon-colored, [HFCS](#)-saturated candy losing its luster as the holy grail of trick or treating?

"I started asking around," she continues, "and realized that while kids still like candy just as much as they ever have, it's now *everywhere*. It used to be a treat, but now it's common. My nephew's first-grade teacher keeps a jar of candy on her desk year-round for rewards; it's at the bank; it's at the dry cleaner."

Colwell-Lipson wondered how to capitalize on this candy overload to create a teachable moment. "We had a window of opportunity: If kids were exposed to conventional candy all the time, we could make special choices available on holidays that were healthier, and more sustainable, too."

Tapping a need among retailers and parents

In 2007, Colwell-Lipson approached her local Whole Foods with ideas for capturing parents' attention and buying power with Halloween-themed promotions that aligned with Whole Foods' values. In terms of health and eco-issues, "no one had touched the holidays," she says; "but [Whole Foods] already had the 'good' candies, the honey sticks and the fruit leathers—they just needed to put them in front of moms' eyes." From this initial partnership, [Green Halloween](#) was born in 2007 as a Seattle-area educational initiative to see whether Halloween's entrenched consumerism and candy overload could possibly give way to something healthier and more sustainable.

Colwell-Lipson immediately found she had opened an enthusiastic floodgate. "I had no idea if it would work," she says. "But we had people coming out of the woodwork to say 'this is the best thing ever—this is gonna be huge.'"

Almost overnight, the idea spread nationwide, thanks to bloggers, word of mouth, and glowing national press.

Green Halloween events and promotions now occur in 25 states across the country, with more communities signing on every year. The website offers downloadable “action kits” for volunteers to get started, as well as dozens of ideas for conversation, parties, and National Costume Swap Day, also founded by Colwell-Lipson and held on the second Saturday in October to reduce landfill waste by an estimated 6,250 tons annually.

Natural partners for Green Halloween

“We all need to work together to create a market for Green Halloween,” she notes. “I work with families, especially with moms, who make 80 percent of the buying decisions, to generate enthusiasm for these products; then I work with the manufacturers themselves to make them available in mini sizes. And I work with retailers to make sure the consumers have access to these products, labeled and displayed so that moms can find them easily. It’s a three-way relationship.”

Green Halloween’s strategic alliances don’t stop with retailers. “We have a great partnership with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums; they put on trick-or-treating events using healthier, sustainable candies, which fits in really well with their conservation efforts. We partner with manufacturers to give these zoos and aquariums candy to hand out at their events.”

Candy criteria

So what actually goes in the bag when a pint-sized Harry Potter or gypsy comes to a Green Halloween door? The nonprofit’s team developed a set of product criteria with the goals of fostering health, sustainability, and fun (it is a holiday, after all).

“We divide Halloween goodies into two categories: treats (food) and treasures (non-food),” explains Colwell-Lipson. “My favorites meet at least one, and ideally all three, of our “3-G” criteria: good for people, good for planet, good for communities. We could also add a fourth “G” in there: good for animals and habitat.” That translates into products that are organic; contain no GMOs, preservatives, artificial colors/flavors, palm oil, or corn syrup; are fair trade (especially important for chocolate); and are made with whole, real foods.

“We also like to include a selection of low-allergy foods, such as gluten free, because the newest stats show that one of every 13 trick or treaters have food allergies,” she adds.

Non-food “treasures” are ideally natural, recycled, or sustainably sourced. “The idea is that these items will be ‘treasured’ long past Halloween and are healthy and safe for kids. These need not be expensive—many can be handmade on the cheap.” She suggests items such as state quarters, seed packets, friendship bracelets, soy or beeswax crayons, recycled-material tops or pencils, and items from nature (acorns, feathers, polished stones, sea glass—as long as they’re legally collected).

What about cost?

It’s all well and good to hand out better-quality candy, but parents might start to object that it’s too hard on the pocketbook. Not so, says Colwell-Lipson. “A lot of people think, ‘I can’t afford these things’; but we forget that we are a supersized nation. When we did a poll, we found out that the norm for handing out candy is one *handful* per child. So if you give away just one really special treasure or one healthy organic treat, it helps to teach moderation and saves you money in the end.”

How to get started

Ready to jump on the Green Halloween bandwagon? Go to the [site’s event page](#) and take your kids to one near you to sample some of these candies for free. Then check with your retailer about which of these candies they stock and encourage more prominent displays.

12 healthier Halloween treats

1. Angell bars

“Up until now, it’s been hard if you really wanted a candy bar and you also care about your health. Angell candy bars have stepped into that place with a great, organic and fair-trade-chocolate candy bar; they’re delicious.”

2. Larabar minis

“What’s not to love? There’s a flavor for everyone; my fave is probably peanut butter and jelly, which appeals to the kid in me. They’re whole, real food that really tastes like a treat. We’ve been handing them out at Green Halloween events since 2007.”

3. Eli’s Earth Bars

“Like Angell bars, these are wonderful candy bars that are also organic and fair trade; plus they give 5 percent of sales to children-focused nonprofits.”

4. Stretch Island fruit leather

“These are safe for kids with allergies because they’re all fruit, with no grains, eggs, or other allergens.”

5. Endangered Species Bug Bites

“This company was really one of the first to ‘get it.’ They realized that people want chocolates in bite sizes, and they have a great-tasting chocolate that both kids and adults love. They’re doing it right.”

6. Nature’s Path Peanut Choco Drizzle Crispy Rice Bars

“A gluten-free rice-crispy bar that is delicious. I have gluten-free kids, and it’s a perfect treat. It’s also organic and they support conservation.”

7. Revolution Foods Grammy Sammys or Yo’ Drops

“Kids love these, and adults like to sneak them! I’m a sucker for PB&J so I love that flavor. Yo Drops are their new item, which are also portable and fun. They also have a recycling relationship with TerraCycle.”

8. Glee Gum minis

“If ten different families are celebrating Green Halloween together, these are perfect because kids are going to want some gum! They’re all-natural, with goofy, fun packaging.”

9. Surf Sweets organic Sour Berry Bears

“There’s lots of room for candy in Halloween; just make sure it’s real food and preferably organic and not filled with artificial colors and all that. This is a perfect candy that parents can feel good about.”

10. Honest Kids drink pouches

“These are fun for a party and you can even give them away if you don’t get a lot of trick-or-treaters at your house. I love that the pouches can be recycled through TerraCycle; it’s a fun thing to do as a family. Plus the drinks are real juice with vitamin C.”

11. Justin's Peanut Butter Cups

With these melt-in-your-mouth organic, fair-trade peanut butter cups, you’ll never go back to Reese’s. Also try Seth Ellis Chocolatier’s organic, peanut-free Sun Cups made with allergen-free sunflower-seed butter.

12. Natural Vines Licorice

Fresh, moist twists made with natural flavors and colors, such as beet juice extract, brown rice syrup, molasses,

and anise. Comes in classic black and yummy strawberry.

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