

The Coastal Star

MAIN MY PAGE CHAT CLASSIFIEDS DISCUSSION EVENTS GROUPS MEMBERS **NEWS** PHOTOS VIDEOS

All Blog Posts My Blog

+ Add

Welcome to
The Coastal Star

[Sign Up](#)
or [Sign In](#)



Paws Up for Pets: Have a scare-free Halloween with costume and candy precautions

Posted by [Chris Felker](#) on October 2, 2013 at 11:00am

[View Blog](#)



Costumed as bride and groom, these romantic pooches are all set for Halloween (or a trot down the aisle).

Photo by Dean Payne



Bug-eyed and bushy-tailed, this photogenic doggie is ready for treats and perhaps a trick or two.

File photo

One of the biggest celebrated holidays — Halloween — is going to the dogs in a big way. Are you sitting down? According to a 2012 survey conducted by the National Retail Federation, Americans spent a record \$370 million on pet costumes last year.

Now, that's a lot of kibble. The money spent also signifies the growing trend of turning dogs (and some highly tolerant cats) into clothes hounds bound for costume parties here and all across the country.

Need a costume idea? Consider viewing the digital 38-page catalog of pet costumes on the website of Rubies Costumes, the world's largest designer, manufacturer and distributor of Halloween costumes and accessories, based in Melville, N.Y.

"Our top seller for this year is the hot dog costume that features a bun on each side and fake mustard on the back," reports Erin Breig, in charge of national sales for the pet line at Rubies. "But our hot dog costumes don't just fit dachshunds. They now comfortably fit a tiny Chihuahua up to a Labrador retriever."

Dressing pets up as ghosts, action or super heroes, witches, pumpkins, devils and bumble bees ranked among the most popular costumes last year.

Here in Palm Beach County, we know how to party with a purpose and with style at events year-round. If the invitation extends to our well-mannered pets, then the event is even more beckoning.

"Halloween can be a fun time for the whole family, but there are potential dangers and sources of stress for some pets when it comes to dressing for the occasion," says Jo Jo Harder, the Boca Raton fashion designer who is the creator of America's Top Dog Model contest. "A pet costume must fit well and remain securely in place. Tight clothing can impair circulation and a loose outfit can get tangled or cover the pet's eyes."

The key is to know your dog's personality and not force him into wearing a costume, adds Kenneth Simmons, veterinarian and owner of Simmons Veterinary Hospital in Lake Worth. Each spring, he sponsors Pawigras, a customer-appreciation event that raises money for local pet charities. Some of the four-legged attendees come in costumes while others appear comfortable sporting only collars or harnesses.

"Test your dog's reaction to wearing a costume first at home. If he starts shaking his head or pawing to remove hats or glasses on his head, remove these items," says Simmons. "If he suddenly freezes in place or drops his head down, he probably isn't a fan of wearing a costume."

Simmons says to avoid any costumes with small items, such as buttons, that could be swallowed and choke a pet.

"Opt for Velcro attachments and never use duct tape to secure a costume in place because you can pull fur and even tear a dog's skin," he adds.

Equally important is to secure your pets in a safe, enclosed room with plenty of pet amenities when you answer the door to dole out candy to trick-or-treaters. Simmons encourages you to give your dog or cat plenty of exercise a few hours before the witching hour. Muffle the door bell sound by playing a radio or television in that room and offer pets some keep-busy toys.

Definitely, keep the Halloween candy out of paw's reach. Simmons reports an uptick in appointments during the holiday season due to dogs consuming chocolate candy as well as the wrappers. Chocolate contains theobromine, an ingredient toxic to dogs that can cause diarrhea, vomiting, nerve damage and death, depending on the amount consumed, its concentration (dark chocolate is the most dangerous) and the size of the dog.

Final decoration tip: Forgo wax candles and opt for battery-operated candles, jack-o-lanterns and other Halloween decorations that can still illuminate a frightening theme without burning whiskers or tails. If you are fortunate to have an outgoing dog who digs costumes, then consider selecting matching outfits to sport at this year's Halloween party invite.

"One of the biggest and newest Halloween trends in pet costumes is to come as a couple in outfits for you and your dog," says Caolaidhe Lundy, store manager and pet fashionista of Barking Babies, in Vancouver, British Columbia. "Last year, for example, I went as Priscilla Presley and my dog, Scotty, a Pekinese cross, went as Elvis. He can't sing like Elvis, but he can sure dance!"

Last year, my dogs — Chipper and Cleo — and I were decked out as '80s rock stars, complete with striped leggings, colorful medallions and pink wigs. I'm not sure which one of us sported the widest grin.