

# TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Become the go-to Halloween hostess with the mostess, courtesy of 5 expert secrets and sanity-saving ideas

By MARY M. MURPHEY  
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**M**ake no mistake, hosting a Halloween party is not for the faint of heart. Those giant spiderwebs on your neighbors' windows don't make themselves, and those scrumptiously scary treats and party favors don't just pop out of boxes readymade. But rest easy, there are shortcuts, secrets and sanity-saving ideas that can make your party a breeze.

## 1. ENLIST HAPPY HELPERS

"Halloween is a great way to spend time with your kids," says Sharon Bowers, author of "Ghoulish Goodies" (Storey Publishing, 2009).

"Nobody comes running when you say, 'Who wants to pick up their toys?' or 'Hey, everyone, let's clear the dinner table,'" Bowers says. "But offer a chance to help make Glowing Jack-O'-Lantern cookies and you're the most popular parent in the world!"

## 2. OFFER A SIGNATURE DRINK

"Make a signature non-alcoholic drink that's good for kids and adults," says Karen Bussen, the author of "Simple Stunning Parties at Home" (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2009).

"Start with Blood Orange Juice and Italian Aranciata (a sparkling orange soda - you can substitute any orange soda you like) and make a Sanguine Sangria, a dark red fruity punch accented with apples and oranges. You can even add a scoop of raspberry sorbet just before serving."

Bussen suggests keeping a bottle of Grand Marnier on hand for interested guests, "and serving the whole thing in a big black cauldron with a ladle."

## 3. DON'T STRIVE FOR PERFECTION

There's no disputing that you make less of a mess frosting a cupcake than your children do, or that you can apply just the right amount of sprinkles to a sugar-cookie witches' cape, but, remember it's their Halloween too.

"Children absolutely love to help decorate the holiday goodies, so I try to let mine do as much as they can. I give them each a share of whatever we're doing, and they frost or decorate their plateful of whatever we're making, and I do the rest," Bowers says.

"When baking with kids, the point is to make it fun, not perfect, and that makes us all calmer."

## 4. KNOW WHEN GROSS IS JUST GROSS ENOUGH

"I like tasty to triumph over horrific when it comes to Halloween food," explains Bowers. "It's one thing to put out a bowl of canned spinach and label it 'Witches' Guts' and another thing to expect anyone to eat it. So keep your funny, entertainment foods (like cold, molded spaghetti "brains") well separated from your yummy party foods, and everyone will go home happier and better fed."

## 5. MIX AND MATCH

When planning menus, Bussen suggests combining a few "rebranded" homemade items with dependable store-bought seasonal foods.

"You can create the centerpiece of the meal, keeping it simple dishes you rename or bump up to add Halloween flavor," she says. Deviled Eggs can become Devilish Eyes in a snap.

"If you're going to make numerous new dishes," Bussen suggests, "take time to test them at least once the week before the party so you feel confident with the outcome and can tweak the recipes to your liking."

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## MONSTER CUPCAKES

Paste coloring and marshmallows make for lurid green monsters with chocolate hair in these enticing little Frankenstein cakes. They have a spicy pumpkin gingerbread cupcake hidden underneath.

### CUPCAKES

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 1/2 cup butter, at room temp.
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 eggs

- 1/2 cup canned pumpkin purée (not pumpkin pie filling)
- 1/2 cup buttermilk

- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### FOR ASSEMBLING THE CUPCAKES

- 1 recipe Cream Cheese Frosting
- green paste coloring
- 18 marshmallows
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 18 pretzel sticks
- chocolate sprinkles, or other candy as desired, for faces

1. Preheat the oven to 350F. Line 18 cups in two 12-cup muffin tins with paper liners.

2. Sift the flour, baking powder, salt, and pumpkin pie spice into a medium bowl and set aside.

3. Beat the butter and sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer until smooth and creamy. One at a time, beat in the eggs, incorporating each egg well, and then blend in the pumpkin, buttermilk, and vanilla. With the mixer on low, add the flour mixture and blend just until combined. Spoon the batter into the liners.

4. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center of a cupcake comes out clean. Cool in the pans for 10 minutes, and then turn the cupcakes out onto racks to cool completely.

5. Color the cream cheese frosting light green with paste coloring. Reserve 1/2 cups of frosting and frost the cupcakes with the rest.

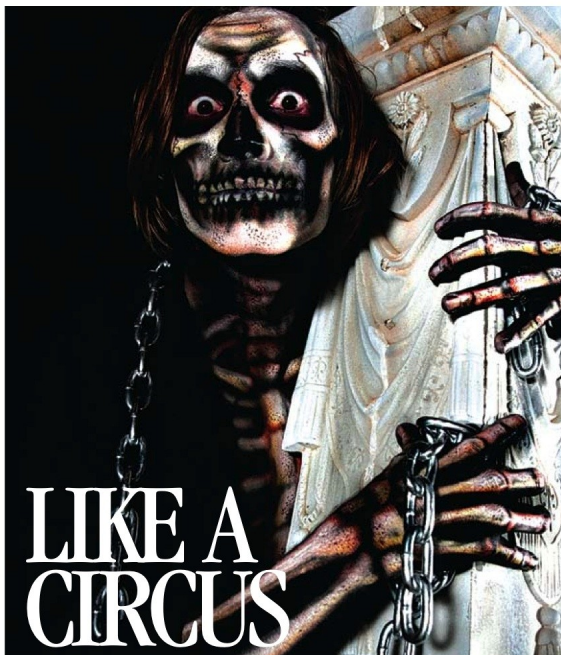
6. Holding each marshmallow by its flat ends, roll the rounded sides in the remaining frosting to coat and color them green. Set on a plate to dry while you melt the chocolate chips in the microwave in 10-second bursts, stirring after each burst. (Alternatively, you can melt the chocolate, stirring frequently, in a double boiler over just-simmering water. Avoid overheating, which can cause chocolate to seize up into a stiff mass.)

7. Dip the top (a flat end) of each marshmallow in chocolate to make "hair." Break a pretzel stick in half and stick one on either side of the marshmallow's "neck." Using another pretzel stick as a paintbrush, make chocolate dots for eyes and a straight line for a mouth, or use the melted chocolate to stick sprinkles or other candy on the front to make a face. Set the finished head on top of the cupcake. Store, tightly covered, for up to 4 days.

Makes 18 cupcakes

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# LIKE A CIRCUS

Make a scene this Halloween with fresh costume ideas and twists on traditional favorites

By JESSICA ABELS  
CTW FEATURES

**W**hether you're going to a spooky soiree or you just want to impress trick-or-treaters at the door, a clever costume can score you and your kids major points on Halloween. Since scouring for the costume that will garner the most shrieks or laughs is often the scariest of tasks, check out these ideas to make you a haunting hit:

### NEVER TOO OLD

"Michael Jackson is going to be a big one this year," says Kendra Weymouth, manager of 911 Costumes based in Waltham, Mass. Make the ultimate tribute to the King of Pop by sporting the one-glove look, or salute another lost star. Weymouth expects Farrah Fawcett and "Charlie's Angels" costumes to be popular as well.

Jon and Kate Gosselin getups will be hot this year, too, says James Sale, owner of Floating Phantoms costume shop in Frisco, Texas. "Usually whatever makes the news is a sure bet," he says.

Or try dressing up as your favorite commercial spokesmen, or spokes-gecko. At Economy Party Supplies in Falls Church, Va., manager Shawn Dimitriades has placed an order for the GEICO gecko costume, and Harold Hamburger, owner of halloweenstreet.com, has a costume to transform you into the Burger King. Another costume shaped like a Wheaties box allows you to stick your head through it and be your own cereal box sports star, Hamurger says.

Several vendors also pointed to 1980s themed costumes as hot ticket items this Halloween. Dig out your crimper, rock some leg warmers and be prepared to profess your love for Emilio Estevez. Try channeling Vanilla Ice, Madonna, the Fresh Prince or Pat Benatar.

### CHILD'S PLAY

"The No. 1 selling kids costume is always going to be Batman," Dimitriades says, and Weymouth adds, "Spider Man is always going to be big no matter what." Costumes for girls stay simple from year-to-year as well, with most vendors reporting that Disney princesses are always best-sellers. Hamburger carries a costume called the Scary Pumpkin Bobble Head that he says soars off the racks. According to Weymouth, the Power Rangers line of costumes were redesigned this year, so expect something fresh and new there.

New movies set to release in 2009 and 2010 provide great ideas for kids costumes too. Weymouth carries a Cheshire Cat costume inspired by 2010's "Alice in Wonderland" remake, which she says can be great for teens.

Dimitriades expects many customers to inquire about costumes inspired by the much-anticipated film adaptation of Maurice Sendak's "Where The Wild Things Are," which will be released in theaters starting Oct. 16.



## DEMENTED WAYS TO DRESS UP YOUR BABY

As a parent of three, I try really hard to give my kids every opportunity in life. They get the finest care and see the best doctors. Their college funds are stuffed with book royalties. But come Halloween, somehow I can't resist dressing them up in costumes most good parents would call unsuitable. Here are some outtakes; you be the judge.

• A Mop: Babies make enough of a mess. Why not turn their crawling into some useful work? Take their pajamas and glue some new dust mops on them. Pretty soon you'll have the cleanest hardwood floors in town. Watch out for sneezing fits or stuff they shouldn't put in their mouths (babies can get clogged up just like your Dyson or Dirt Devil).

• A Member of Kiss: Whether it is Gene (the Demon), Ace (the Spaceman), Peter (the Catman), or even Paul (the Star Child), no Kiss character makes an acceptable costume for your baby. Sure, Kiss rocked out, but they didn't rock hard enough that you should dress your kid in honor of them.

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### DIY DELIGHTS

Often the most original and inspired costumes come as the result of homemade design on a shoestring budget. "There are really simple ways to make costumes using items you have around the house," says Traci Niese, publicist for "Homemade Halloween: Quick and Easy Costumes, Decorations, and Not-So-Frightening Family Fun" (Fox Chapel, 2008). She offers these quick and easy do-it-yourself costume solutions:

- Use metallic dryer tubing and silver spray-painted boxes to transform into a robot
- Attach a strip of scored white poster board to white fabric and stuff with batting to create a chef's hat
- Make a pirate hook using a large yogurt container, aluminum foil and the top of a metal hanger

Look in closets for items like striped t-shirts (for pirates), trench coats (for detectives) or long pearls and fringe dresses (for flapper girls). Just be sure to leave some time for minor adjustments and repairs before heading out the door.

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