

Halloween Safety for Cats



Halloween is a wonderful opportunity for children (and many adults) to engage in fun and frivolity, but for cats it is filled with dangers—some of them extreme. Fortunately, there are ways that you can make the holiday delightful rather than frightful for your cat.

Why Is Halloween Scary for Cats?

Throughout history, Western culture has had a love-hate relationship with cats, especially [black cats](#). Although the ancient Egyptians revered cats, our culture has maintained various unpleasant superstitions about them. Starting in the Middle Ages, certain groups associated cats with witchcraft and evil and believed that witches could turn themselves into cats. Far too often, misguided ideas about felines have led to the violent persecution of both cats and the people who cared for them. For instance, in the 16th and 17th centuries, tens of thousands of cats, along with humans accused of being witches, were cruelly put to death.

Today, although cats are the most popular pet in the United States and other Western countries, mean-spirited anti-cat bias persists, sometimes with disturbing echoes from the past. Unfortunately, some unstable people who have been exposed to callous or hateful attitudes toward cats use Halloween as an excuse to capture and viciously abuse them.

Because the Halloween season seems to spark violence against cats in general and black cats in particular, many shelters refuse to allow the adoption of black cats during the month of October. Unfortunately, this does not protect cats that are normally outside from would-be sadists and other miscreants at Halloween-time.

Felines face additional dangers during Halloween that typically do not occur with other holidays. On Halloween night, there are great numbers of people outside, including children who may be quite rowdy on this occasion. Teens and adults attending or returning home from Halloween parties may be emboldened by the role-playing and faux-satanic nature of the event—and possibly the influence of alcohol—to commit acts of cruelty toward cats that otherwise might never cross their minds (or at least be stifled by common sense). Keep in mind that Halloween parties may take place throughout October and even early November.

Combine all these dangers with the increased traffic, noise, and shouting present on Halloween, and the great outdoors can turn into a very frightening, unsafe place for a cat.



Create a Haven for Your Cat During Halloween

So to keep your cat safe, all you have to do is keep your feline friend inside, right? Actually, not letting your cat out on and around Halloween is your first priority, but it's not enough. All the trick-or-treaters ringing your doorbell over and over and yelling every time the door opens may scare the wits out of the bravest cat. Here's what you need to do to help ensure your cat's safety and comfort on Halloween:

- If your cat is an indoor-outdoor cat, start keeping him indoors the week before Halloween night because many communities celebrate Halloween before the traditional day on Oct. 31. It may also take several days for your cat to get used to staying indoors, and you may have to deal with a lot of yowling at the door and several attempts to sneak out. It's better to know how to handle this behavior beforehand.
- Secure your cat—whether your cat is an indoor or outdoor dweller—in a comfy room with everything he will need on the night of trick-or-treat: his litter box, favorite nap cushion, food, water, and toys (check out [these Halloween toys](#) for your cat). While you're at it, toss in a perch, one or more scratching pads or posts, and maybe some [catnip](#) (although some cats are overstimulated by catnip; learn more in the article: "[What Does Catnip Do to Cats? Why Do Cats Like Catnip?](#)"). Make sure your cat has a place to hide, as well; space under the bed usually suffices —though you may want to dust there first.
- Give your cat something to distract him from all the nerve-wracking noise going on in and outside the house. Try some [soothing music](#) if that appeals to your cat. Spray a little [Feliway](#) in selected spots to help alleviate some of your cat's stress. Feliway is a synthetic product that simulates the action of a special cat pheromone, a chemical marking agent, to induce relaxation in cats. You can

learn more about it in this article: "[Feliway - A Useful Tool to Help Treat Stress in Cats](#)." Most importantly, visit your cat frequently in his room and be reassuring and affectionate so he won't feel he's being punished. If your kitty's in the mood for playing, see if you can spare a couple of minutes here and there to engage him. There's nothing like [stalking](#) and pouncing on a toy mouse to take the edge off. You may also want to leave your kitty with a treat on one or two of your visits.

- As tempting as it may be, don't allow your children to parade their Halloween costumes in front of your cat. Cats do get frightened when their human companions look different from usual. Although it may seem funny to see your cat's reaction to your children's masks, it can truly be terrifying to the cat. And before you consider dressing your cat up in a costume, read this helpful article to find out if it's a good idea: "[Cat Costumes: Purr-ific or Cat-astrophe?](#)" If you do want to get your cat in the Halloween act in a happy way, check out Halloween-themed protective nail caps from [Soft Paws®](#).

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- Keep your cat away from Halloween candles and Jack-o-Lanterns. While they're a great way to highlight the ambiance of the holiday, they're very dangerous for your cat. He may try to swat the flickering flame and burn himself or knock over the candle, starting a fire. For this reason, we recommend against using Halloween candles in households with cats. Electrical wires, which some cats are fond of chomping on, are also a hazard, so keep them away from your cat. Learn more about it here: "[Fire Safety for Cats](#)."
- If you have a Halloween party, keep your cat secure in his haven for the duration of the festivities. Put a sign on the door informing guests not to open it and not to let the cat out. If someone isn't familiar with your home, he or she may mistake your cat's sanctuary for the bathroom or coat room.
- Don't let your cat get into decorations that could be harmful to him. Be especially careful with [string, ribbon, yarn, and tinsel](#). They can be very dangerous if your cat swallows them because they can block or catch on parts of the intestines, which may then require life-saving surgery.
- Prevent your cat from eating Halloween candy—especially [chocolate](#), which is poisonous to cats. Relay this warning to your children, who may decide to be generous and share their candy with the cat.
- Watch out for candy wrappers because they can also be harmful if your cat ingests them. And those plastic bags that the candy comes in can be dangerous, especially to rambunctious kittens who could get trapped inside them and suffocate. Store your children's Halloween bounty in a place that's inaccessible to your cat.

- After Halloween, get rid of aging pumpkins, which can quickly harbor bacteria. If your cat samples a rotting pumpkin, she can get very sick. For information on whether it's safe to feed your cat pumpkin and the best way to prepare it if you do, check out "[Is Pumpkin Good for Cats?](#)"



If Your Cat Bolts

There are all sorts of reasons why a cat might dart out the door. Here are several precautions you should take well in advance of Halloween to minimize the chance of your cat wandering off and to help ensure that he quickly returns on his own, safe and sound.

- Above all, create a warm, secure, fun, accommodating, and meaningful home environment for your kitty. You want to be confident that he feels that the safest, most comforting place for him is his own home. You want to have a strong sense that when your kitty feels threatened, he considers his home to be his best refuge. Your cat should like where he lives and have an attachment to it.
- Get your cat [microchipped](#). A microchip is a tiny, harmless, permanent identification device inserted just below the skin by your veterinarian. The procedure takes a few seconds and is usually painless.
- Put a breakaway collar with an attached [identification tag](#) on your cat. The breakaway aspect of the collar is a potentially life-saving safety feature. If your cat is wearing the collar and it gets caught on something, your cat's weight or tugging will cause the collar to come apart, thus freeing him from the threat of strangulation or getting caught by a predator. You can learn more in the article "[Cat Collar Controversy.](#)"
- Train your cat to come when called. Devise a simple, unique call that you think sounds enticing. Once a week—once a day at first—initiate the call in your kitty's presence while letting him see that you're getting his favorite treat. Reward him with the treat and lots of praise when he approaches you. He'll catch on soon enough. You can also use [clicker training](#) to teach your cat to come. Learn how here: "[Clicker Training for Cats: Come When Called.](#)"
- Try to train your kitty to accept being picked up and held. Start slowly, just touching his sides, and then his belly, then picking him up for one second, and so forth. Reward him each time he complies, and always let him go when he indicates that that's what he wants; the exercise should not be stressful for him. Rewards may include petting and praise and/or looking out a window that's impossible for him to reach without your help. Not all cats will agree to being picked up, but it's worth a try.

When you have guests in your home, consider implementing the following strategies:

- Assign a volunteer whom you know to be trustworthy to be an assistant cat-watcher. This person can make sure that your kitty stays in his private party suite and that guests quickly shut the door behind them when they exit the house.
- Put signs on all doors that lead to the outside and that guests might use. The signs can say something like "Please don't leave the door open, so my kitty doesn't escape. Thank you!"



If your cat does get out, here's what to do:

- Remain calm.
- If you're hosting a party, ask your guests to refrain from being boisterous until you get your kitty back in. You may have to repeat this request.
- Get rid of any Halloween accouterments that you think might frighten your kitty. Extinguish any flames. Since you temporarily don't want to attract trick-or-treaters, you may want to turn off the front porch light.
- Use the call you practiced with your kitty to get him to come to you. Have his favorite treats ready.
- If you have not established a "come here, kitty" call, call your cat as you would under normal circumstances.
- When you see your kitty, try to encourage him to come in. Conspicuously open a can of his favorite food, or shake the treat jar—make whatever sounds to which he usually responds.
- If your cat doesn't come in on his own, approach him calmly, perhaps speaking to him in a quiet, reassuring voice. Unless you know he runs away when you try to pick him up, consider picking him up. Swoop in quickly but gently. This is a judgment call.

If you live in an apartment or condominium complex and your front door does not lead directly to the outside, the risks if your cat gets out are reduced but certainly not eliminated; all the aforementioned safety precautions are still recommended. If you live in a high-rise, have a balcony, and throw a party, it is crucial that your cat be kept securely in a safe room for the duration of the party.

At the End of the Day

After the commotion has died down and you've put all the dangerous stuff away, give your cat a hug or chin scratch for being such a good kitty and putting up with all the loud, strange humans. Let him sniff around the house and reclaim his territory. He may want to indulge in some play to relieve pent-up stress.

Going Forward

The outdoors holds many amusements for your cat, but danger is lurking as well—and not only on Halloween. Cats are safer living indoors. You may want to make Halloween an opportunity to turn your outdoor cat into an indoor feline and secure him safety forever, not just on this holiday. Make the indoor environment compelling from your kitty's point of view. Fill your home with [sturdy scratching posts](#), comfy perches at different heights (with scenic views), and interesting hiding places. Engage in daily interactive play for your cat's mental stimulation and physical exercise. Knowing your cat is safe and happy inside with you is the best treat you can give yourself and your feline this Halloween season.



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