



25

Frightfully Simple
Ways to Save Money on
Costumes, Candy & More

Halloween

on a Budget

By ERIN GIFFORD

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HALLOWEEN ON A BUDGET | COUPON CRAVINGS

Readers,

It's that time of year again. The kids are barely back in school and the Halloween chatter has already begun. Not only has it begun, but it's in full swing...on the bus, at home, on the way to soccer practice, on the way home from soccer practice. "What are you going to be for Halloween?" "Where should we go trick-or-treating?" "Mom, when are we buying Halloween candy?"

The more my kids talk about all the costumes and candy, the more I see dollar signs (and multiple dollar signs at that), but Halloween does not need to be an expensive holiday. I've spent more than my fair share in the past, but this year it's going to be different.

I spent some time re-evaluating my Halloween spending over the years (and boy have I over-spent), and took the time to consider and write down 25 ways to save this year on Halloween. In this e-book, you'll find multiple ways to cut back on spending without putting a damper on the fun and festivities of Halloween.

From costume swaps to recycling candy to making your own decorations (for you crafty types), you'll find everything you need to save a bundle this Halloween. If you have more fabulous tips and tricks, send them my way at erin@couponcravings.com. I'd love to post and share your ideas. Happy Halloween!

Erin Gifford

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GETTING DRESSED UP

The perfect Halloween costume is a must-have, of course, but there's no need to break the bank for a few hours of trick-or-treating. It doesn't matter what your kids want to go as this year, there are so many easy ways to get the costumes they want on the cheap. Take a look at these 11 ways to save big on Halloween costumes this year.



1. SWAP COSTUMES

October 8 is National Costume Swap Day so consider swapping or borrowing costumes from friends or neighbors. If you participate in a mother's group or monthly Bunco night, suggest that moms bring costumes they won't be using this year to do an informal swap before or after the program.

Visit [GreenHalloween.org](https://www.GreenHalloween.org) to find a costume swap near you. You'll also find tips there on how to organize a costume swap in your neighborhood. It's incredible, but more than 6,000 tons of landfill waste could be avoided by trading costumes instead of buying brand new ones each year.

2. HIT THRIFT STORES & CONSIGNMENT SHOPS

Now is the time to start browsing your local thrift and consignment stores for Halloween costumes. Not only can you find gently-used costumes, but also party dresses, military outfits and cowboy gear that may be perfect for a make-it-yourself costume.

Thrift stores and consignment shops are also perfect for accessories, like necklaces, feather boas and evening gloves. A couple of years ago my daughter went as Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz and we found a great pair of sparkly red shoes for less than \$5. [Goodwill](https://www.goodwill.com) has a great section on their website of costumes created from items found in their stores.

3. BARGAIN HUNT ON EBAY

You'll find loads of costume choices on eBay. I did a quick search and more than 400,000 items were returned in a search for 'Halloween.' Of these, more than 8,000 listings popped up under the 'Children's Clothing & Shoes' section, so there are plenty of choices.

If you have a specific costume in mind, don't forget that you can save your search and get a daily email from eBay when items show up that match your search. This will save you time trying to hunt down those Halloween essentials on eBay.

4. DIG COSTUMES OUT OF THE BASEMENT

If you have more than one child, you probably have a handful of costumes from previous years in the basement ready to be reused. I know we do. So dig through the boxes of old clothes before you open your wallet for brand new costumes.

I have four children and pretty much every year my youngest child (at the time) has gone as a bumblebee on their first or second Halloween. It's a perfect costume for either a girl or a boy, and at age one or two, they really don't mind their costume choice.

5. MAKE YOUR OWN COSTUMES

This option definitely isn't for everyone, including me. I have no crafting skills and wouldn't know what to do with a sewing machine, but there are plenty of make-it-yourself costume ideas for kids at AllYou.com and Parents.com for those moms and dads who are up for making costumes this year.

Just do a quick web search for 'Homemade Halloween Costumes' or 'Create Your Own Costumes' to find some great ideas. [Kaboose](http://Kaboose.com) has a great section of Halloween costumes, as does [Costume Idea Zone](http://CostumeIdeaZone.com).

6. TRY DRUGSTORES & DISCOUNT RETAILERS

The drugstores have already started to discount Halloween costumes. As of mid-September, Walgreens has marked down costumes by 25%.



As we get closer to Halloween you'll find these discounts will get bigger and bigger, so if you aren't looking for anything in particular and can afford to wait, this is a great way to save.

Head online to **CVS.com** and you'll find they've teamed up with **HalloweenExpress.com**. You'll get free shipping when you spend \$35 as well as a 15%-off coupon to use on any costume. Also, look out for printable coupons to use at CVS, Walgreens and Target.

7. HIT DAILY DEAL SITES

Last year, **Groupon** had great deals to get \$30 to spend at **BuyCostumes.com** and **CostumeHUB** for only \$15. They also had several deals to use at local costume shops. I imagine any day they should be rolling out these Groupon deals, so get on the mailing list.

Children's daily deal sites, **Zulily**, **The Mini Social** and **Totsy** had lots of great costume deals for little ones last year, so keep your eyes open as we get closer to Halloween. Most of these sales run for several days, but popular costumes and sizes can sell out quickly.

8. HUNT DOWN COUPON CODES

It's easy to dress up for Halloween on the cheap when you hunt down the coupon codes you need first. [Savings.com](#) has a special section just for Halloween coupons, and right now you'll find coupon codes to save at [BuyCostumes.com](#), [Celebrate Express](#), and [Costume Discounters](#).

Of course, you'll also find loads of coupon codes when you do a web search for just Halloween coupon codes. Or, type in the name of the retailer or style of costume along with the search term coupon codes to find more specific codes for online costume shopping.

9. GET ON EMAIL LISTS

Sign up to receive printable coupons and online coupon codes from party stores and costume shops. Over the weekend, I received a one-day only coupon by email to save 30% at [Party City](#) on anything in the store. [BuyCostumes.com](#) will give you a 15%-off coupon just for getting on their email list.

10. USE COMPETITOR COUPONS

Often you can use a competitor coupon to save on Halloween costumes. For example, you can use competitor coupons at both [AC Moore](#) and [Michaels](#). You'll occasionally find restrictions on printable competitor coupons (i.e., some stores will only honor competitor coupons that come from a Sunday newspaper), but it's a good idea to have both handy.

11. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PRICE-MATCHING POLICIES

Big discount retailers, including [Target](#) and [Walmart](#), will honor a competitor's price if the shopper brings in the ad to show a sale price. This is a great tool to have in your savings arsenal when [Target](#), for example,

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sells out of the must-have costume of the season, and Walmart still has a few left on the shelves.

It's a good idea to review price-matching policies online and even bring a copy with you should you encounter a sales associate who is not as familiar with their store's policy as you are. You'll find Target's policy here: <http://bit.ly/targetpolicy>. Walmart's policy is here: <http://bit.ly/walmart-policy>.

I WANT CANDY

Trick-or-treating isn't complete without the obligatory bowl of candy to hand out to ghosts, goblins and the occasional Justin Bieber look-alike. Unless you choose to spend the night out (or worse, spend the night in and just turn the lights off), you'll need candy. Take a look at these eight ways to save big on tempting treats for your trick-or-treaters.



1. PRINT & CLIP CANDY COUPONS

As we get closer to Halloween, you'll find more and more printable coupons for bags of candy to hand out to trick-or-treaters. Right now, you'll find printable coupons to save on bags of Wonka and Nestlé candy at [Coupon Network](#), and [Coupons.com](#) has coupons to save on Skittles, Starburst and Life Savers candies.

2. RATION YOUR CANDY

Hand the candy out yourself and decide ahead of time how much to give each child knocking on your door. Your bowl of candy won't last long if you let the trick-or-treaters decide how much to take. It will last even less time if you simply set out a bowl on your doorstep for anyone to take as much as they please.

3. BUY CANDY IN BULK

A large bag of candy will cost less per piece than a very small bag of the same candy. Buy the biggest candy bags you can find, but don't go overboard. It's never a good deal if you end up with candy you don't need after the trick-or-treaters are done for the night.

4. PURCHASE CANDY ONLINE

An often overlooked way to save on Halloween candy is by buying online. Try [The Online Candy Shop](#) or [Candy Warehouse](#). I just spotted a Starburst-Skittles Variety Bag (172-ct) for \$19.99 (reg: \$39.99) and a Reese's Miniatures Box (105-ct) for \$10.17 (reg: \$26.16) at The Online Candy Shop.

5. CHOOSE JOLLY RANCHERS OVER FUN SIZE CHOCOLATE BARS

A bag of sugar-base candy, like Jolly Ranchers and Sweet Tarts, is cheaper than the same size bag of chocolate-base candy, like Hershey bars and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. I also try to buy candies that aren't my favorite (I'm not a huge fan of Jolly Ranchers) to keep me from buying way more than I need and eating them well past Halloween.

6. BUY CHEAPER CANDY

Don't turn Halloween candy into a popularity contest. There is no award for which house has the best candy, and it's not like trick-or-treaters will remember where they got which candies anyway. I prefer not to have the best candy on the block to avoid having late-comers and double-dippers who come by twice for candy. I like to wind down trick-or-treating by 7:30 or 8 so I can get my kids ready for bed.

7. OPEN CANDY BAGS AS TRICK-OR-TREATERS COME TO YOUR DOOR

Sure, it's impressive to have a HUGE bowl of candy, but it's not so impressive when you only get rid of half the bowl and you're stuck with a bunch of candy you can't return to the store. Start with one or two bags in a bowl and then open new candy bags as you run out of candy. This way if you find you've over-bought by a few bags, you can easily return them to the store (be sure to keep your receipts!).

8. RECYCLE YOUR CANDY

It's no sin to take candy out of your kids Halloween bags to give to trick-or-treaters, especially if you're like me and prefer for your kids not to have the hard and sticky candies. Since my oldest is only eight, my kids tend to start and finish trick-or-treating early in the evening. So, once they get home, I sort out all the no-no candy and hand it back out to new trick-or-treaters coming to my door.

BOBBING FOR APPLES

If you're planning to host a Halloween party and in need of festive decorations, you'll want to keep an eye on your budget. This is probably one of the easiest areas to over-spend, but it doesn't need to be that way. Here are six ways to save on Halloween parties and get-togethers.



1. SET A BUDGET

Of course, setting a budget is the simplest way to save money on Halloween decorations and festivities. Think about what you can afford to spend and stick to that number. Sales are great, but don't get tricked into buying more than you need and going over-budget.

2. MAKE A PLAN

The worst thing you can do is hit the discount store or craft store with no idea what you need for your party. It's easy to say "I'll just see what they have," but this plan is destined for failure. Choose a theme (e.g., pumpkins, witches, ghosts), and stick with it.

As a bonus, choose a theme that can also be used at Thanksgiving. By decorating for the season rather than just for the holiday, you'll not only save money, but you'll have another month before you need to switch out your decorations.

3. TAKE INVENTORY

This is probably the easiest area to fail on your budget. If you don't know what you have, it's impossible to know what you need. Sure, you might say you'll just return duplicate items, but you never will, or worse, you'll lose the receipt, and then you're stuck with those extra tombstones and skeletons. Total fail.

4. TAG TEAM WITH SALES AND COUPONS

As the days draw closer to Halloween, you'll find that the prices of decorations at craft stores, like Michaels and AC Moore, go lower and lower. These stores are ready to bring in the Christmas decorations, so they need to move that Halloween merchandise out of the store.

Look for the ads in the Sunday papers, then clip the coupons in the ads to save in-store. Go online for coupons too. You'll find coupons to save up to 40% and 50% each week to use at these stores. Even better, both stores take competitor coupons, so it's a win-win for you.

5. LOOK FOR YARD SALES

True, this tactic may work best during the spring and summer months when Halloween isn't quite so top-of-mind, but it's definitely worth checking out yard sales in your area to see if you can pick up any plastic pumpkins or funky lighting.

6. GET CRAFTY

Okay, I am not crafty, not at all. But if you are crafty, then Halloween is a great time of year for you. There are so many great DIY tutorial posts and videos online to help you create just about any kind of Halloween decorations you desire, whether you want to make your own **bats and spiders** or **spooky ghosts**.

START PLANNING FOR NEXT YEAR

Once the sun peaks out on November 1, get thee to your closest craft, dollar or discount store to scoop up decorations and party supplies at deadly deep discounts. Of course, follow all of the guidance above that relates to setting a budget and making a plan, and then get ready to save up to 75% and even more on all things Halloween.

In the first week after Halloween, you'll find the best bargains and will thank yourself when Halloween comes around next year. Good luck and happy trick-or-treating!



APPENDIX

HALLOWEEN CRAFT & COSTUME RESOURCES

AllCrafts.net

<http://www.allcrafts.net/halloween.htm>

Better Homes & Gardens

<http://www.bhg.com/halloween/crafts/>

Disney Family

<http://www.allcrafts.net/halloween.htm>

Family Fun

<http://familyfun.go.com/halloween/>

Free Halloween Crafts

<http://www.allfreecrafts.com/halloween/index.shtml>

HGTV

<http://www.hgtv.com/topics/halloween/index.html>

Kaboose

<http://crafts.kaboose.com/holidays/halloween/>

Martha Stewart

<http://www.marthastewart.com/photogallery/creepy-crafts>

ABOUT ERIN GIFFORD



Erin Gifford is a working mother of four children, including three girls and a two-year-old boy. She lives in the Washington, DC area and has spent most of her career working in public relations both at agencies (Fleishman-Hillard, Ogilvy PR Worldwide) and in-house (AOL, ZipList).

Erin started **Coupon Cravings** in May 2008 as a way to share discounts and money-saving advice to help readers save big in this economy. She regularly employs and shares strategic shopping techniques to help others do more with less.