

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

It is that time of year when some people are planning Halloween costumes for themselves and their pets. Each year at the thrift shop, we look forward to seeing what costume Jeanne Hornak comes up with. She loves Halloween! Last year she was an old time convict in black and white stripes. She was joined by volunteers Rob Taite, Sue Killinger and her dog, Maya. They, including the dog, were dressed as Officers of the Law.

The following are guidelines by Dr. Sandra Mitchel, DVM written for Petmed.com, for choosing a pet costume for your pet if you are someone that likes to do this. Know your pet – if it is fun for the pet go for it. If it is traumatic for them, take a pass.

Costumes can come with some risks, so read on to find out how to prevent any health issues or injuries while your pet is out trick or treating or celebrating at home.

A very common problem with pet costumes is that they are often sold as “one size fits most,” and they only come as small, medium, and large breed options. A teacup poodle is certainly just as much a small breed as a Lhasa Apso, but the body proportions and sizes are very different, and a small-breed costume is most likely not going to fit both dogs safely.

Be sure to measure your pet and compare it to the measurements of the costume before settling on a final outfit. If a costume is too big, it might trip your pet, leading to an injury. If it is too small, it could squeeze your pet, limit her ability to breathe normally, cause rub sores, and generally be uncomfortable.

Once the costume is on, be sure to closely watch the body language of your animal. If it acts uncomfortable or frightened, take the costume off and consider a stylish alternative like a spooky bandana, appropriate bow tie, or something else to show off the season without adding stress to your pet.

Not only should the costume fit well and be comfortable, but it should also allow your pet to perform all its normal motions. It needs to be able to see, hear, bark, walk, run, and move about just as always. If the costume includes a mask or shoes, these are best used for short-term “photo ops” and not for general wear.

One way to make certain your pet can get around comfortably for the big night is to do a test run with the costume a few weeks beforehand

Any costume that covers the face may block the vision or hearing of your pet. Watch carefully to be sure that the costume doesn't droop over the eyes, making it hard for your pet to see where it is going. This could lead to a fall and a potential injury, especially if your dog will be trick or treating in an unfamiliar place. Additionally, pets are more likely to be frightened or stressed if they don't feel like they have all their senses, especially at night. Remember that there may be other people or dogs in costume, which might be a scary experience for your pet! When in doubt, leave off any obstructing portions of the costume.

Although not common, animals can have allergic reactions to fabrics and detergents, just like people. This is another reason for a trial run.



Most costume manufacturers design the costume with the pet parents in mind and not necessarily the safety of the animal. Many costumes have accessories that are loose or can easily be chewed, and these can be swallowed and cause a choking hazard or a gastrointestinal blockage.

Costumes should be considered a “supervised only” toy. No animal should ever be left alone while in costume because even with a relatively safe outfit, there is always an increased risk of injury. Always leave a responsible adult in charge of the leash so that the pet is appropriately supervised.

If there are other animals around, keep in mind that pets use body language as a form of communication, and there will be a change in the signals given off by any pets in costume. This could lead to a conflict, even between dogs that were previously friendly. Always have your pet on a leash when multiple dogs are around and in costume for safety’s sake.

Just like not all people enjoy getting dressed up to go out, not all pets enjoy getting dressed up either. Most cats will offer their opinions of a costume freely. Dogs might be a little more “go along to get along,” but if your dog has folded down ears or eyes looking sideways or rolling back, or it starts slinking around with a tucked tail or hunched spine, the pet probably isn’t having as much fun with the costume as you are

Since Halloween is all about spooky, your pet might see something that startles it, causing it to run away. Should this happen, it is most likely that your pet will be returned to you quickly if its wearing a collar with clearly visible ID tags and a microchip with current contact information.

If you ‘trick or treat’ with your pet, make sure you put the candy or treats out of reach of your pets!

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