Don't let animals get spooked this Halloween
By Julia Lamont

As the countdown to Halloween begins, I've been stocking up on candy and dusting off the spooky décor to ready my house and yard for a night of trick-or-treating. My young daughter loves the decorations — and, let's be honest, the sugar high — that come with this frightfully festive night. But amidst all the fun, I always consider the impact on our pets and local wildlife. That's because this spooky season comes with plenty of potential pitfalls for our four-legged friends, wild birds, and more. Here's how to protect animals this Halloween, without sacrificing the fun.

Dangerous decorations
Sure, you want to set a spooky scene, but some decorations are more treacherous than others. Jack-o'-lanterns and other candles are a burn risk if a curious pet comes too close — not to mention a major fire risk in a county parched by severe drought — so opt for battery-operated, flameless candles if you crave that telltale flicker on your front porch. If you use decorations that plug into an outlet, be sure animals can't chew or get tangled in the electrical cords. And steer clear of fake cobwebs, which can trap birds and cause serious harm if ingested by your pets.

Out of paw's reach
That bowl of candy is tempting to more than just trick-or-treaters. Candy is unsafe for pets and chocolate is particularly dangerous, especially dark chocolate. It contains a toxin called theobromine, which can cause poisoning in both dogs and cats.

Signs of chocolate poisoning can include vomiting and diarrhea, rapid panting and heartbeat, and increased thirst and urination. And while milk chocolate is less of a threat, the sugar and fat in a candy bar can still cause your pet plenty of gastrointestinal distress. Call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (888-426-4435) right away if your pet has ingested chocolate.

Provide a safe space
Opening the front door over and over for trick-or-treaters can mean lots of escape opportunities for your pets, not to mention a lot of stress. Ringing doorbells and

crowds of loud, unfamiliar people in costumes can be frightening for shy cats and nervous dogs that could attempt to bolt, or even bite.

Consider keeping your pets in a quiet room away from the commotion and from open doors. Playing music, the TV, or even a white noise machine can help temper the noise.

ThunderShirts apply safe, constant pressure, which soothes anxious dogs much like swaddling an infant. And always make sure your pets are wearing proper identification — a collar with an up-to-date name tag, a current license for dogs, plus a microchip — just in case they do manage to slip out during the evening's festivities.

Don't force dress-up

Some pets are amenable to a little dress-up and may do just fine strutting in costume. But others may become anxious, irritable, or overwhelmed. While it can be fun to get that perfect shot for social media, if your pet is easily stressed, skip the costumes. If your furry friend is open to their festive finery, make sure there are no parts that can get caught around their neck or mouth or any pieces that can be chewed or swallowed. Never leave your pet unattended in a costume. Supervision is the name of the Halloween game.

Halloween doesn't have to be a hair-raising event for our furry companions. With a little planning and a little caution, your pets can also have a safe and healthy holiday.

Julia Lamont is the social media and marketing specialist for Marin Humane, which contributes Tails of Marin articles and welcomes animal-related questions and stories about the people and animals in our community. Go to marinhumane.org, email lbloch@marinhumane.org or find us on social media @marinhumane.