Sustainability and Recycling

Spooktacular & Sustainable: Simple Tips for a Greener Halloween

Halloween is full of mystery, magic, and fun - but it can also create a surprising amount of waste. From single-use plastic costumes to synthetic decorations and disposable candy wrappers, the spookiest night of the year leaves behind a heavy footprint.

The good news? You don't have to sacrifice any of the fun to make your celebrations gentler on the planet. With a few thoughtful swaps, you can keep Halloween treat-filled, hauntingly fun, and eco-friendly.

Costumes: Rethink, Swap, and Thrift

Mass-produced costumes are often made from synthetic fibers like polyester and PVC, ending up in landfills after just one night. Instead of buying new:

Host or Join a Costume Swap: Gather friends, neighbors, or colleagues to trade last year's outfits and accessories. Kids outgrow costumes fast, making swaps an easy win for families.

Shop Thrift & Vintage: Local consignment and thrift shops are goldmines for unique costume pieces, wigs, and vintage apparel.

DIY with What You Have: Get creative with everyday clothing, cardboard boxes, fabric scraps, and face paint. A homemade costume always stands out for its originality.

Low-Waste Décor: Go Natural & Reusable

Skip plastic spiderwebs and cheap foam props that break down into microplastics. Choose decorations that are durable, compostable, or reusable:

Embrace Autumn's Bounty: Pumpkins, gourds, corn stalks, dried fallen leaves, and hay bales make beautiful seasonal displays. Best of all, they can be composted after the holiday.

Upcycle Homemade Haunts: Transform old bedsheets into floating ghosts, turn cardboard boxes into eerie tombstones, or craft hanging bats from scrap paper.



Invest in Quality: If you buy artificial decorations, choose durable pieces you'll look forward to using year after year.

Sustainable Trick-or-Treating

Tote bags, pillowcases, wicker baskets, and fabric buckets make excellent, long-lasting candy collection bags that eliminate the need for flimsy plastic pails and can be reused after the spooky season ends.

When it comes to treats, standard individual wrappers aren't recyclable in residential curbside bins. To help minimize waste:

Look for Sustainable Packaging: Opt for treats that come wrapped in foil or compostable paper.

Consider Non-Candy Alternatives: Pencils, mini notebooks, wooden charms, seed packets, or stainless-steel cookie cutters are fun options that last well beyond Halloween night.

Give Pumpkins a Second Life

Don't let your jack-o'-lanterns rot in the trash where they produce methane emissions and take up precious landfill space.

Compost Them: Remove any candle wax or tealights and place your carved pumpkins directly into your backyard compost bin or organic waste drop-off site.

Feed Local Livestock: Un-carved, unpainted pumpkins can often be donated to local farms, wildlife sanctuaries, or livestock owners as a delicious treat for pigs, goats, and chickens.

Pumpkin Smash: Take them to the 2nd annual Pumpkin Smash on November 13th in Performance Square.

Making Halloween sustainable isn't about perfection - it's about small, creative choices that add up across our community. By reusing what we have and choosing natural options, we can keep the frights in the festivities and out of the landfill!

Avoid the Trash—Join the Smash!

It's pumpkin season, but what happens to your jack-o'-lantern after the spooky festivities end? Each year, over one billion pounds of pumpkins end up rotting in landfills, creating a massive amount of unnecessary waste.

This year, don't trash your pumpkin, smash it! Join the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County for the 2nd Annual Pumpkin Smash, a festive, family-friendly event focused on eco-friendly fun and proper pumpkin disposal.

What to Expect:

Jack-o'-Lantern Drop: Carved or uncarved, bring your candle- and paint-free pumpkin to drop them from spectacular heights!

Pumpkin Bowling: Do you have small, uncarved pumpkins or gourds? Bring them down to bowl them into real pins, donated by Sleeping Giant Lanes!

Pumpkin Explosions: Not in the mood to drop your own pumpkin? Watch the show and cheer on others as whole pumpkins are dropped and shattered into pieces!

Friday, November 13th, (during Fall Art Walk)

4:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Performance Square on the Walking Mall. All ages welcome!

Questions? Call 406-447-8463

Compost for a Cause: Every smashed pumpkin will be collected and transported to the Lewis and Clark County Landfill. Mixed with local green waste, they'll be transformed into nutrient-rich, garden-grade compost.



Sustainable Food Canning and Preservation Tips

As gardens reach their peak production, many people look for ways to preserve the bounty of the fall harvest. Food preservation is a traditional skill passed down through generations and is a sustainable practice that reduces food waste, saves money, and helps households enjoy locally grown foods throughout the year.

Safe and Sustainable Home Canning

Canning remains one of the most popular preservation methods for home gardeners and local food enthusiasts. Properly canned foods provide nutritious meals for months while reducing dependence on commercially packaged products.

Water bath canning: Ideal for high-acid foods such as fruits, jams, jellies, pickles, and tomatoes prepared according to tested recipes.

Pressure canning: Ideal for low-acid foods, including vegetables, meats, and soups, to safely eliminate harmful bacteria.

When canning:

- Always use research-tested recipes from trusted sources.
- Inspect jars and lids for cracks or damage before use.
- Label jars with the contents and date preserved.
- Store canned goods in a cool, dark location.
- Rotate stock by using the oldest items first.

Freezing: Simple and Effective

For many households, freezing is one of the easiest preservation methods. Vegetables such as corn, peas, green beans, and broccoli can be blanched and frozen. Fruits like berries, cherries, and apples also freeze well and can later be used in smoothies, baked goods, and sauces.

Using reusable freezer containers and minimizing excess packaging further supports sustainable living practices.



Dehydrating Foods for Long-Term Storage
Dehydration removes moisture that can lead to spoilage, while retaining much of a food's flavor and nutritional value. Apples, tomatoes, herbs, mushrooms, and peppers are excellent candidates for drying. Properly dried foods require little storage space and can last for months when kept in airtight containers.

Fermentation: An Ancient Preservation Technique
Fermentation has seen renewed interest among home food preservers. Foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi, fermented pickles, and yogurt rely on beneficial bacteria to create flavorful products while extending shelf life.

Fermentation requires minimal equipment and offers a creative way to preserve excess produce during the harvest season. Many people also enjoy the unique flavors and potential digestive benefits associated with fermented foods.

Root Cellaring and Cool Storage
Not all foods need to be canned or frozen. Many root vegetables, including potatoes, carrots, onions, beets, and winter squash, can be stored for extended periods under proper conditions. A cool basement, insulated storage room, or traditional root cellar can provide ideal conditions for keeping produce fresh well into winter.

Checking stored produce regularly and removing any damaged items helps prevent spoilage from spreading.

Share the Harvest
Another sustainable option is community sharing. Excess produce can be donated to local food banks, churches, senior centers, or neighbors. Garden swaps and community harvest tables are growing in popularity and help ensure surplus food is enjoyed rather than discarded.

As the fall harvest season approaches, now is an excellent time to gather supplies, review preservation methods, and plan how to make the most of this year's garden bounty. Whether canning, freezing, dehydrating, fermenting, or sharing with neighbors, preserving food helps strengthen household resilience, reduce waste, and celebrate the harvest traditions that have long been part of our community.



Now Accepting Used Cooking Oil!

The City of Helena Transfer Station is excited to announce that used cooking oil is now being accepted for recycling! Residential users can recycle up to five gallons of cooking oil per customer, per day, at the designated area in the Transfer Station.



Instructions for Recycling:

Cooking Oil Only: Make sure oil is free of food residue by running it through a strainer or cheesecloth before dropping it off. Keep oil free of water and other contaminants.

Disposable Container: When dropping off oil, be sure to leave it in a disposable container, as you will not get the container back.

Drop Off: Leave container in designated used cooking oil space, next to automotive batteries at the Transfer Station Recycling Area.

Once the used cooking oil has been dropped off, staff pours the oil into a collection tank which is then picked up and recycled into animal feed through Full Circle Biofuels.

Helena Water Usage: July - August 2026

	July	August
Ten Mile	193.4	158
Eureka	17.21	16.9
Missouri River	97.5	143.8
Monthly Total	308.1	318.7
Peak Day Demand	12.1	11.8
Average Day	9.1	10.3

Comparison in millions of gallons. Differences between treatment plant outputs are typically due to maintenance or the need to utilize additional water sources as natural water flow fluctuates throughout the year.

Want to see more from us?

Go to www.helenamt.gov/Sustainability to sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Follow the City of Helena on Facebook and Instagram!

Transfer Station Hours

CLOSED OCTOBER 12 FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY

Open daily, 8 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.

Vehicles must be unloaded and out of the facility by 4:30 p.m.

HELENA-LEWIS & CLARK SOLID WASTE & RECYCLING