

# Halloween costumes – what not to wear



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Bye bye pagan roots, hello a world of fancy dress stress. Here's how to get it right by avoiding blackface and Slutoween

Oh for the time when Halloween costumes were, first and foremost, about being scary. The ancient superstition of 31 October was still lingering, just about, during my childhood in Wales. We'd dress up as either ghouls or witches to trick or treat the night before winter. How I long for those days when even chubby children were given sweets, rather than a harshly worded letter regarding obesity addressed to their parents.

Nowadays, many a purist complains that the festival's creepy, pagan roots are being forgotten in favour of such activities as competitive pumpkin carving, E-number quaffing, eggy neighbour-bothering, and fatuous readymade Miley Cyrus costume wearing, a trend for which we can only blame those pesky Americans. So what to wear?

With the advent of the internet, the choosing of a Halloween costume has become a loaded activity. Forget your mum cutting holes in a sheet or the classic donning of a last-minute bin bag, when you've got costume over-achiever Heidi Klum dressed as the Hindu goddess Kali, a full-feathered raven, the apple of temptation, or Lady Godiva complete with horse (the list goes on). And don't bother with those plastic witches' hats with the fake green hair attached. That is so 90s, babes, not to mention insensitive towards all our sister witches persecuted for their beliefs. Even Private Eye wouldn't resort to such sexist cliches.

It's time to tear up the rulebook and start again with these new rules:

## **Know how soon is too soon**

If you're wondering how soon is too soon, then chances are it's too soon., there are certain real-life monsters who were so awful and frightening that they have rendered themselves deserving of a Halloween costume – provided a certain grace period has passed, naturally. Remember, the golden rule is to be scary and gruesome, not gratuitously cruel. This advice was sadly not followed by a distant acquaintance of mine who was ejected from a party for being dressed as Harold Shipman – by a girl whose elderly relative had been murdered by the doctor.

### **Dress your baby up, they're too young to be embarrassed so who cares?**

Look! It's a baby! Dressed up as a lobster! In a pot! For the entertainment of adults!

### **Don't disrespect other people's cultures**

Not to get all PC brigade on you, but is this really so hard? Can't you just put down that native American headdress? (I can see you. Put. It. Down). By all means go as a character from another race, it is possible to do this sensitively, but an Arab or a Mexican is not a Halloween costume. Also, fancy dress should never, ever, involve the wearing of blackface. I don't care how much you love Obama.

### **Make sure you're easily identifiable**

There's nothing more annoying than having to repeatedly explain your costume to strangers. "I'm the human immunodeficiency virus," you mutter to your drinking companion, as people stare at you in disgust. Saying it out loud makes it less funny, somehow. Though unfunny is perhaps preferable to incomprehensible obscurity.

### **Try not to embrace Slutoween**

Time to confront head-on the line made infamous by Tina Fey: "Halloween is the one night a year when a girl can dress like a total slut and none of the other girls can say a word about it." From the 90s onwards, lingerie paired with animal ears became a legit costume choice for women, and the sheer range of sexy costumes on the market is staggering. I'm not about to slut shame you for wanting to be the "office tramp", or even the "sexy pizza" made famous by the Daily Show last week.

But a friend who dashed down to Ann Summers to pick up a maid's costume found herself fielding repeated requests for vodka from inebriated men who assumed she was a shot girl rather than a guest, which clearly would not have happened had she gone to Take Back Halloween – "a costume guide for women with imagination" – and copied their incredible Baba Yaga costume. Which of course she would never do, because Baba Yaga is dead ugly and sometimes looking sexy is fun.

Freedom lies in having options. Options that don't make people cry on the best night out of the year, except maybe with laughter. Which is why I'll be going as a false widow spider. With stockings and suspenders, obviously. Have a good one.

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