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Grown-ups can celebrate Halloween, too

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Halloween, the holiday built around the twin pleasures of playing dress-up and eating too much candy, is obviously a hit with children.

But send invitations to your grown-up friends and you'll probably find they haven't outgrown the urge to don creepy costumes and celebrate in spooky, theatrical style.

Want to host a party that merges Halloween fun with grown-up sophistication? Turning your home into a haunted mansion is surprisingly easy, said interior designer Brian Patrick Flynn, founder of Flynnside Out Productions.

Just ditch the cheerful orange pumpkins and smiling ghosts for darker, more creative décor.

"Stay away from anything cute," Flynn said, "and instead opt for creepy-chic."

Here Flynn and two other design experts — Jon Call of Mr. Call Designs and the latest "HGTV Star" winner, Tiffany Brooks — offer decorating advice for a memorable, stylish and affordable Halloween party.

Natural fabrics

Cheesecloth evokes ancient mummies, while burlap brings to mind scarecrows.

Both fabrics are inexpensive and lightweight, but sturdy — perfect for Halloween party tablecloths.

These solid-color pieces also have a more adult feel than the whimsical prints on Halloween tablecloths or napkins designed for kids.

Call likes using large sheets of brown craft paper on buffet tables or as a runner down the

center of a Halloween dining table.

Cluster small gourds (the darker and more oddly shaped, the better) along the runner, he said, then add a few large pillar candles.

Easily and inexpensively, "you've knocked out a table that's great for any fall holiday," Call said. And cleanup is simple: "After a party, throw the paper out."

Flynn said you can make your home's entryway extra creepy by soaking large pieces of cheesecloth in tea, then shredding the cloth once it's dry.

Hang the pieces from the ceiling above your porch or drape it from walls with a few well-placed nails to conjure up the feel of a haunted house.

Dark, dangerous colors

All three designers suggest using a muted palette of grays, browns and black. Brooks suggests spray-painting pumpkins glossy gray to create a glamorous centerpiece.

Use orange only as an accent, Flynn said, perhaps adding a few orange napkins to an otherwise black and gray table setting.

You can also create a dramatic scene by spray-painting empty wine bottles in a matte black, he said, then replacing the labels with your own creations: Using scrapbooking labels or cardstock and a Sharpie, come up with creepy names for the liquids supposedly in the bottles.

Flynn also suggested buying inexpensive wooden birdhouses or cheap Christmas village houses, then spraying them with dark gray or black paint to create a mini-ghost town for display on your buffet table or bar.



AP PHOTO

Bare branches, spray-painted black and secured in vases with gravel, floral foam and a layer of moss make a stunning and inexpensive Halloween centerpiece, created by designer Brian Patrick Flynn for HGTV.com.

Weird walls

Take down any cheerful artwork and replace it with old portraits from thrift shops or flea markets. Halloween stores sell deliberately creepy portraits made for this purpose, but it's more fun to hunt down real paintings, said Flynn.

Brooks agrees that this easy decorating move can transform the feel of a room, especially if the room will be lit only by candles. (She plans to shut off her electricity entirely during a Halloween party this year, filling each room with just enough black pillar candles to provide dim, flickering light.)

Once you've hung your

new gallery of portraits, Flynn suggested taping tiny pieces of black construction paper over the eyeballs in the pictures for a haunted mansion feel.

Serious things

Flynn also recommends trolling thrift shops and flea markets for items that evoke dusty, dated Victorian style, or midcentury pieces that seem lifted from a '60s Hitchcock movie.

Fill old apothecary jars and other glass containers with water tinted with yellow and green food coloring to suggest formaldehyde. Then drop anything — tiny plastic animals, seed pods, bits of moss — into the colorful liquid. Or create

terrariums by filling glass vases with twigs, moss, and tiny plastic bugs and snakes.

Seek out second-hand treasures: real or fake taxidermy, stone bust bookends, antique dolls and toys, and vintage books and laboratory or surgical equipment. If you're lucky, you might even come across some old mannequin heads.

What was once a wig display can serve as an eye-popping Halloween centerpiece.

Other inexpensive additions to your party space: Fill vases with bare branches spray-painted black, tying a few small bats from a craft store to the limbs.

Flynn also suggests slipping belts around the backs of chairs to suggest that dinner

guests may not escape the table easily.

And Brooks recommends using a hodgepodge of mismatched and even scratched dishes from thrift shops (cleaned well, of course) to give your table an off-kilter, haunted house feel.

A finishing touch to inspire Halloween guests: "One of my neighbors here is an actor," said Brooks, who lives in Antioch, Ill. "So she's going to come in as a guest and get the conversation going in a creepy direction."

Chances are you know at least one person who would take on the role of spooky storyteller or mystery visitor, adding a layer of theater to the party.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Gardeners from Samuel Chapel United Methodist Church, in Itta Bena, show off their bountiful harvest.

Growing Together Network announces 2013 contest winners

FOR THE DELTA DEMOCRAT-TIMES

STONEVILLE — Fall means harvest time in the Mississippi Delta.

Groups of dedicated gardening teams across the Delta are enjoying the harvest bounty by participating in a gardening network contest, including attending workshops on growing sustainable food supplies.

The 2013 Growing Together Community Garden Contest and Network, a partnership of Delta Health Alliance and Delta Fresh Foods Initiative, provided an opportunity for church, community, school and youth gardeners to learn proper cultivation techniques to ensure long term success and supply the community with fresh produce, a commodity lacking in many Delta towns.

2013 marks the third year of the Mississippi Delta Growing Together: A Network of Church, Community, School and Youth Gardens and the second year for the contest.

The contest requirements for participating garden groups were few, and con-

testants were judged on workshop participation, community awareness and involvement, youth participation, maintenance and sustainable growing practices, variety of produce and suitability of the plantings. Design and total visual effect were also taken into account with extra points awarded for creativity and ingenuity.

Garden groups taking home top honors were:

■ First place and recipient of \$1,000 for garden supplies and equipment was Samuel Chapel United Methodist Church, Itta Bena.

■ Second place and recipient of \$750 toward supplies and/or equipment was Right Strides Community Garden, Coffeeville.

Garden groups having perfect workshop attendance will receive \$400 gift cards to purchase additional supplies for their garden.

Samuel Chapel United Methodist Church, of Itta Bena, Right Strides Community Garden, in Coffeeville, and Brooks Elementary School Garden, Dun-



can, all attended the series of workshops.

Teams attending two of the three workshops and receiving a \$200 gift card are DSU Wiley Community Garden, Cleveland, MEGA (Mississippians Engaged in Greener Agriculture), of Shelby, and Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Greenville.

Winners will be recognized and featured in a slideshow during Delta Fresh Foods Initiative Third Harvest Celebration and Awards Gala on Oct. 24 in Clarksdale along with recognizing Delta Farm to School leaders.

For more information about organizing a garden group or starting a community garden, contact Leslie Johnson, Delta Health Alliance Community Garden Project Manager, at 662-686-7004.