Where to donate leftover Halloween candy, and what each place takes

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Where to donate leftover Halloween candy after 1 November: troop programs that still take it, dentist buybacks, food banks, and what each wants (unopened only).

The day after Halloween, the easiest places to give candy away are a troop program that takes it by mail (Troopathon takes unopened candy until 31 December), a dentist's buyback in your town, or a food bank or shelter that has said yes on the phone. Some of the best-known programs stop collecting on Halloween itself, so it's worth knowing which ones are still open before you pack a box. Every program below was checked at its own page on 31 October 2026.

I'm a parent who built Peabody, a free reading and math site for kids. Our house has the same pile on the table every 1 November, and I wanted one honest list: who still takes candy, what they take, and what to do with the rest. The longer version, with recipes, experiments and candy math, is on the what to do with leftover Halloween candy page.

The short list

- Where: Troopathon's Halloween Candy Buyback · Takes candy: Until 31 December · What they want: Unopened candy, chocolate included; kids' notes and drawings welcome · How: Mail or drop off in Sacramento, California, with a note saying who you are
- Where: Operation Shoebox · Takes candy: Says all year · What they want: Candy of all kinds · How: Read its own page for the address first
- Where: Soldiers' Angels: Treats for Troops · Takes candy: Until Halloween, at collection sites · What they want: Candy at a site on its map · How: Mostly closed by 1 November; one for next October
- Where: A dentist's buyback · Takes candy: Often the first few days of November · What they want: Usually unopened candy · How: Ask your own dentist, or search your town's name with "candy buyback"
- Where: Food banks, shelters, Ronald McDonald Houses · Takes candy: It depends · What they want: Unopened, wrapped candy, if they take it at all · How: Call first

Troop programs

Most candy donations end up in care packages for service members. Troopathon collects in the first two weeks of November and takes boxes until 31 December. Its page asks for unopened Halloween candy and treats, full-size or fun-size, chocolate included, and turns away opened candy and anything homemade. Put a note in with your name, group, email and

phone number so it can thank you. Notes, cards and drawings from kids are welcome, and so are toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss.

Operation Shoebox says on its own site that it is always accepting candy, of all types, whenever it suits you. It doesn't put a mailing address in that line, so find the right one on its site before you post anything.

Soldiers' Angels runs Treats for Troops through collection sites, often dentist offices, listed on its Candy Map. The sites collect until Halloween and ship by 30 November, so on 1 November most have already stopped taking candy. If you liked the idea this year, look for a site on the map next October.

A job for the kids: Veterans Day is 11 November. A thank-you note or a drawing in the box turns giving candy away into something they made, not just something they lost.

Dentist buybacks

Plenty of dentists, and some other local businesses, buy candy back in the first days of November. Some pay a little money, often about a dollar a pound, some give a toothbrush or a small prize, and most send the candy on to one of the troop programs. There's no single list for every town, so the quickest way is to ask your own dentist or search your town's name with "candy buyback". Call before you go: days and hours vary, and some only take candy from their own patients.

Food banks and shelters

This is the one people ask about most, and the honest answer is that it depends. Some food banks, shelters and Ronald McDonald Houses are glad of wrapped candy for children; others can't take it, or have more than they can use by mid-November. A two-minute phone call saves a wasted trip. Whatever they say, bring only unopened, wrapped candy.

Before anything goes in a box

1. Sort it together. Tip the bag out on a clean table. The American Academy of Pediatrics says to wait until children are home to sort and check treats, and to throw away anything spoiled, unwrapped or suspicious (healthychildren.org).
2. Let your child choose what stays. A pile of favorites to keep, a pile to give. Giving away the ones they'd never eat anyway is a fine place to start.
3. Keep the giving pile closed. No opened packs, nothing homemade, nothing loose.
4. Little ones first. If there's a brother or sister under 4, the hard candy, gum, gummies and anything with whole nuts go straight into the giving pile, because those are choking risks for babies and toddlers.

Sorting is math too: counting in tens, a tally, a bar graph of which kind came home most. The trick-or-treat games page has games to play with the candy before it goes.

What to do with the candy you keep

Spread it out. The AAP's advice is to ration treats over the days and weeks after Halloween and to keep candy rules realistic, consistent and positive. Plenty of families settle on a jar on a high shelf and one or two pieces with lunch.

Chocolate freezes well for baking later: seal it in a bag and let it thaw inside the bag. Then there's candy bark, chopped-candy cookies, a candy rainbow on a plate of warm water and gummy bears that grow overnight, all on the leftover candy page. For a candy-free evening, the library has stories for every reading level.

Questions grown-ups ask

Can I donate opened Halloween candy?

No. Every program here takes unopened, wrapped candy only. Opened candy is for eating at home or throwing away.

Do troops really want Halloween candy?

The programs above pack it into care packages for service members, and Troopathon adds kids' notes and drawings to the boxes. Chocolate is fine for Troopathon; it says so on its page.

Is it too late to donate on 1 November?

Not for Troopathon, which takes candy until 31 December, or for Operation Shoebox, which says it takes candy all year. Soldiers' Angels' collection sites mostly stop on Halloween, and dentist buybacks usually run for a few days in early November.

Do food banks take Halloween candy?

Some do and some can't. Call your local food bank or shelter first, and only bring unopened, wrapped candy.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up to read. Nobody on this list paid to be on it.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/where-to-donate-leftover-halloween-candy