

HALLOWEEN AT THE COOP: THE TRICK OF TREAT

October 3, 2024

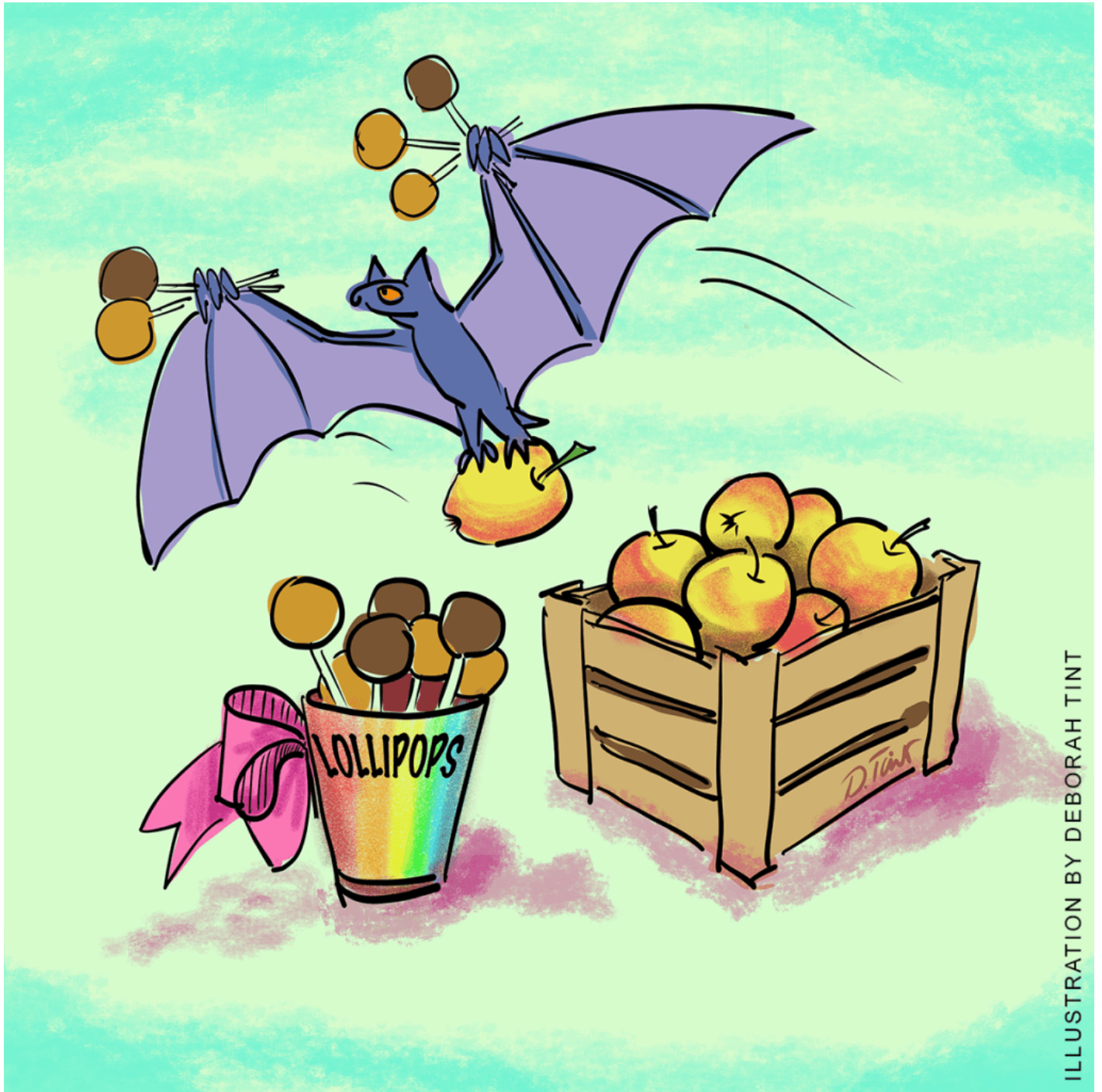


By Kim Velsey

October 15, 2024

Every Halloween, the Coop sets aside small apples donated by Hepworth Farms to give out to trick-or-treaters, a tradition that reflects the Coop's commitment to healthy, fresh, seasonal foods. The holiday is generally a low-key affair at the store, but members enjoy celebrating it—it's common for staff and shift workers to show up in costume that day—and the Coop carries a number of seasonal items for decorating, eating and giving out to trick-or-treaters.

“We bring pumpkins in for the three weeks before Halloween, starting around October 7,” says Cecelia Rembert, a receiving coordinator and one of the Coop’s produce buyers. “We don’t want to get them too soon because they get kind of gross. And we try not to have any left over. Turns out no one wants them on November 1.” Last year, the Coop sold nine bins (or 5,850 pounds) of carving pumpkins, mostly from Hepworth Farms, one of the Coop’s oldest produce suppliers. There are also pie pumpkins, which many people like to paint for Halloween, and a variety of gourds to decorate. You can find turnips and potatoes in the produce department as well, the root vegetables that were traditionally carved at Halloween. Pumpkins, a new world vegetable, didn’t make their way to Europe until the 1500s, and it was several centuries after that that they became associated with Halloween.



There is also, of course, candy. Although this year, there may be fewer options than in years past. Gillian Chi, a receiving coordinator and buyer who handles the Halloween candy, says that many of the pre-orders she put in early this summer for Halloween-themed products from member favorites like YumEarth, Ocho and Tony Chocolonely have been canceled because those products are out of stock. It's not clear why the distributor, UNFI, one of the Coop's largest suppliers, hasn't been able to fulfill the orders (requests for a comment from YumEarth, UNFI and Ocho were not re-

turned), but it's been a problem during the past few years. Chi says she's had luck in years past reaching out directly to contacts at those companies, but that hasn't yielded any success so far this year.

CANDY PRICES HAVE SHOT UP SINCE THE PANDEMIC, INCREASING 27.5% FROM 2021 TO 2023, ACCORDING TO THE BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS.

When Chi first started working as a buyer, she focused on increasing the organic candy offerings: She could see there was a need for organic Halloween candy and it sold well. Popular items in the past have included the YumEarth lollipops in Halloween wrappers—they also made an organic candy corn, the first on the market, but since discontinued—and individual bags of gummy bats and spiders. Tony Choclonely's individually-wrapped Halloween chocolates were a hit as well. Apparently, anything in a Halloween shape or with a Halloween wrapper sells well. Hard candy does not. "For the last eight years or so, I've tried to have Halloween candy take over the entire end cap," says Chi. "But for the last few years it's been so hard to get stuff [that] it's just been a couple of shelves."



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

So what can shoppers expect to see on those shelves soon? Snyder's pretzels in Halloween pouches, Endangered Species Not So Spooky milk chocolate mix, Pirate Booty trick-or-treat puffs, Good Crisp Creepy Crisps and Torie & Howard Halloween lollipops. It's also possible that the gourmet candy buyer may score some Halloween-themed items, if they are buying for themselves (or really trying to impress the neighborhood kids). But stocking up on even the non-gourmet products will be pricey. Candy prices have shot up since the pandemic, increasing 27.5% from 2021 to 2023, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Cacao and sugar prices both went up after disappointing harvests brought on by bad weather, which have continued to be an issue (while there were early fears this might lead to candy shortages, in the end candy just became a lot more expensive). A seven ounce bag of individually wrapped YumEarth gummy candies cost \$3.90 in 2019; last year it cost \$7.64. This year, the Coop hasn't been able to stock it at all.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

If shoppers are disappointed in this year's candy selection, however, they can always follow the Coop's example and stock up on a few cases of apples to hand out. After a late frost last May devastated upstate apple orchards, farmers are reporting a bumper crop this season.

Happy Halloween, shoppers!

Kim Velsey has been a Coop member since 2020. When she's not writing for the Line-

waiters' Gazette, *she's a staff writer at New York Magazine.*