

LIFESTYLE 4:30 p.m. Friday, October 22, 2010

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Halloween candy used to be so simple – a few bags of fun size Milky Ways and mini boxes of Milk Duds and no complaints from the munchkins with their plastic pumpkin candy holders and pillowcases.

Now we have surveys telling us which candy is most popular among the social media crowd (Butterfinger, according to the NetBase Brand Passion Index) and which has the biggest Facebook following (again, Butterfinger – and yes, one might inform the other).

And then there's that Zillow.com poll that examined scintillating data such as housing reports and loan requests to pinpoint Atlanta as the 15th best city in the U.S. to trick or treat.

But even though research and candy tastes might be more specific, that isn't deterring anyone from buying mass quantities of it.

A recent National Retail Federation survey determined that Americans will spend \$1.8 billion on Halloween candy this year. Survey participants also said they expected to spend more than \$20 on candy, a figure that retailers haven't seen since 2008.

Not sure yet what you're buying? Here are some suggestions:

A healthy choice

Welch's Fruit Snacks are fat free, gluten free and contain vitamins A, E and C. That's the part you don't tell the kids. But give them choices of Fruit Punch, White Grape Raspberry, Island Fruits or Berries 'n Cherries, and they'll never realize they're eating a healthier alternative to a Kit Kat bar, which, shockingly, packs 220 calories and 11 grams of fat into a snack size bar.

A traditional choice

Snickers and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups seem to top most unscientific polls, so let's go with those as the most popular choices. And why not? You're talking about chocolate, peanuts and creamy nougat in one and chocolate and peanut butter in the other. If you don't have some sort of affection for either of these (allergies notwithstanding), clearly, there is no blood running through your veins.

A new choice

If you're a Peeps aficionado, surely you know about the Chocolate Mousse Marshmallow Cats that joined the cellophane packages of sticky ghosts and jack o' lanterns last year. This season, Peeps headquarters unveiled Chocolate Covered Marshmallow Pumpkins, which are filled with orange-colored fluff, dipped in milk or dark chocolate and individually wrapped for handout purposes.

A green choice

A bag of Yummy Earth USDA certified organic lollipops will provide some sugar without chemical colors (organic black carrots and organic pumpkin take care of that), artificial flavors or corn syrup. Flavors include Pomegranate Pucker, Mango Tango and the kinda-gross-sounding Wet Face Watermelon.