

## **Día de los Muertos**

### Day of the Dead

#### Day of the Dead Altar Elements

Day of the Dead altars are set with different elements depending on the region; these differences are established by the availability, seasonal flowers and fruits and the traditional food from the area. Other elements are shared everywhere in the country. Most altars would include some or all of these elements:

#### Picture

A picture of the evoked relative is placed in the altar to make him present and revive his image.

#### Flowers

The altar is decorated with fresh flowers as it is believed that their scent will make the returning souls feel welcomed and happy. The flowers used to decorate the altars are known as Day of the Dead Flowers, and their use depends on local costumes, local availability and financial capacity.

The cempasuchil or flor de muertos (flower of the dead) is one of the most used flowers during the celebration ; in some places its petals are set to make a path from the house door to the altar thus showing the way to the returning souls.

#### Different Levels

In some areas altars are made with two levels that symbolize heaven and earth; in others they are made with three levels for heaven, purgatory and earth; and there are places where altars with seven levels are placed, each of these levels represents the steps a soul has to make to get to heaven.

#### An Arch

Symbolizes the entrance to the world of the dead. In the places where it's set it can be made with cempasuchil flowers like in Michoacán State, or of reed like in Puebla State.

#### Chiseled Paper

The papel picado or chiseled paper are paper flags chiseled with saints' figures or skulls and skeletons that are placed like a table cloth in the altar. To some people they represent the element air for the way they move.

#### Day of the Dead Bread

Day of the dead bread or pan de muertos is different in every region of the country and one of the most important elements in the altar as it is a fraternal offering to the souls in the catholic sense.

#### Candy Skulls

Sugar, chocolate or amaranth seed skulls represent the death and its every moment presence.

### Candies

Alfeñique (almonds paste) fruits, donkeys, angels and skeletons and all kind of homemade candies are set to treat the children's souls.

### Food

Every region in Mexico has a special dish that is considered the most festive and tasty and it's usually the main food offered in the altar. A good example is the turkey with mole; these dishes are expensive and most of the families in the rural areas only make them for this occasion. Tamales, atole, fruits like oranges and apples and desserts like the calabaza en tacha (candied pumpkin) are also part of the offering.

### Spirited Drinks

Tequila, mezcal and pulque (fermented agave juice) are offered to the adult souls so they can relax and enjoy with their family. If the honored one smoked a pack of cigarettes is then set in the altar.

### Candles

Candles show the souls their way to the altar and back to the dead world; they symbolize the light, hope and faith. The number of candles in the altar depends on the local tradition, in some regions a candle is set for each honored soul, in others four candles, one for each cardinal point are placed in the altar while in most places the number of candles depends on the economic capability of the family setting the altar.

### Religious Elements

The most common are crucifixes and Virgin Mary and patron saint images.

### Petate

Petates (palm tree leaf woven carpets) are set aside for the souls to lie down and rest.

### Water

A glass of water is set in the altar to calm the souls' thirst after their long journey.

### Copal

The resin of the tree that has the same name is burned to purify the place and to attract the souls with its sweet smell.

### Salt

A small plate with salt is set in the altar as a purifier element.

### Personal Objects

In some areas the honored tools, clothing or toys are added to the offering to make him feel at home.

## Ornaments

Candle holders, incense burners, papier mache or clay figurines such as skulls or skeletons doing a certain activity or animals. In the some areas a clay xoloitzcuintli dog is set in the altar to make the children souls feel good in their arrival to the fete.

The souls will only take the essence out of the food and drinks so at the end of the celebration or in some places during the event, the family will gather and eat and drink the offered goodies and often share them with the community members.



