



How to Celebrate Day of the Dead

WHAT IS DAY OF THE DEAD?

The Day of the Dead, or *Día de los Muertos*, is a holiday celebrated throughout Mexico, and by people of Mexican ancestry living in other places, especially the United States. It is acknowledged internationally in many other cultures. The multi-day holiday focuses on gatherings of family and friends to pray for and remember friends and family members who have died and help support their spiritual journey.

You, too, can celebrate Day of the Dead at home. Use the information below to help you set up your own altar and celebration!

CREATING YOUR VERY OWN ALTAR!

What is an altar?

In many Latin American countries, it is believed that the dead are allowed to return to Earth once a year, on the Day of the Dead. Here's your quick guide to make sure you're ready to design your altar to honor the loved ones who'll be returning.

One of the key elements of *Día de los Muertos* revolves around ofrendas, or offerings, which are created through a visual display of altar-making. The offerings displayed in your altar will be a main focal point and show the dedication and distinct love presented toward the dearly departed. Altars can be created through a wide spectrum of dedications, depending on one's creative desire. You can design your altar with 1-4 levels. You can place a cardboard box upside down on top of the table. Shoe boxes can be a great & easy trick to create each level.

The altar includes the four main elements of nature: Earth, Wind, Water, and Fire

- Earth is represented by the crop. The soul is fed by the various earthly aromas. Placing fruit or favorite family dishes on the Altar provides nourishment for the beloved souls.
- Wind is represented by a moving object. Papier-mache or intricate *papel picado* (tissue paper banners) is commonly utilized to represent the echoes of the wind.
- Water is placed in a container for the soul to quench its thirst after the long-awaited journey to the Altar. Water is also used for the means of purification.
- Fire is represented by a wax candle. Each lit candle represents a loving soul, and an extra one is placed for the forgotten soul. Please use battery operated candles only.



Other things to know

- *Cempasuchitl* is the marigold known as the “flower of the dead.” It blooms in the valleys of Mexico during the months of October and November with a bright yellow color and is central to altar decorating. This flower aids the spirits to wander back. These can be made out of yellow or gold color tissue paper. Below are directions for how you can make your own marigolds.
- Pictures are widely used to honor the deceased individual.
- The common symbol of the holiday is the skull, which is celebrated and represented by decorative masks called calacas. In addition, sugar skulls are also tastefully created and inscribed with the names of both the honored and living recipients on the forehead as a reminder of our own mortality.

Shoebox Altars!

If you have limited space for creating your altar, you can create it in a shoebox! Take the same ideas from the tabletop altar above, and scale it down to fit in a shoebox.



RECIPES

No Day of the Dead celebration is complete without yummy food! Try these recipes to serve at your Day of the Dead celebration.

Abuelita Hot Chocolate

Directions

- With an adult's help, heat 4 cups of milk and the chocolate bar using the stove or a microwave until it starts to boil. Be careful, it will be hot!
- Pour the milk and chocolate in a blender and add sugar to taste. Pulse for 30 seconds or until fully mixed.
- Serve and enjoy a frothy delicious chocolatey drink.



Ingredients

- 1 Abuelita chocolate bar
- 4 cups of milk
- sugar to taste

Sugar Skull Sugar Cookies

Sugar skulls are an incredibly important part of a Day of the Dead altar. Everything about *Día de los Muertos* is bright and colorful, especially the decorations. The reason a holiday revolving around death is so full of color instead of being gloomy and gray is because we celebrate the lives led by those who are now gone. It's not simply a day about mourning our loved ones and telling stories of them around their tombstones in the cemetery and our altars; it's a day about remembering their lives and the impact they had upon us, as well as keeping in mind that just because they're no longer with us doesn't mean that they're entirely gone, because we keep them alive in our hearts and memories.

Directions

- Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). In a small bowl, stir together flour, baking soda, and baking powder. Set aside.
- In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar until smooth. Beat in egg and vanilla. Gradually blend in the dry ingredients. Roll out dough with rolling pin and use skull cookie cutter in this kit to cut out skull shaped cookies.
- Bake 8 to 10 minutes in the preheated oven, or until golden. Let stand on cookie sheet two minutes before removing to cool on wire racks.



Ingredients

- 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups white sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Icing for decoration

(You can make your own or use store-bought icing.)

Directions

- In the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the confectioners' sugar with the egg whites and 1 teaspoon lemon juice and beat on low to medium-low speed until the icing is completely smooth, 3 to 5 minutes. When the paddle is lifted from the icing, a peak in the icing should be created, which should fall over just a bit. It'll be slightly thicker than the filler icing. To reach the right consistency, add 1/2 teaspoon more egg whites and/or lemon juice at a time to thin the icing, or 1 teaspoon more confectioners' sugar at a time to thicken the icing.
- Divide this icing into 5 or 6 small prep bowls. Add pea-size amounts of food gel or coloring to all the bowls save one, and mix, adding more gel or coloring as needed to achieve the colors you desire.
- Have fun decorating your sugar skull cookies!



Ingredients

- 3 cups confectioners' sugar
- 2 large egg whites
- 1 to 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- various food gels or natural food coloring



IT'S TIME TO DECORATE!

You may want to host a party for your household. Below are directions for how to make some of your very own Day of the Dead decorations.

Marigolds

Día de los Muertos altar decorations usually include hand-cut paper marigolds or fresh marigolds. Why Marigolds for *Día de los Muertos*? It is believed that the spirits of the dead visit the living during the celebration. Marigolds guide the spirits to their altars using their vibrant colors and pungent scent. The marigold most commonly used in *Día de los Muertos* celebrations is the *Targetes erecta*, Mexican marigold, or Aztec marigold, otherwise known as *Cempasuchitl* or flower of the dead. Mexican marigolds are quite tall, reaching up to 3 feet tall.

Directions

- Take one sheet of tissue paper and cut it in half, then cut that piece in half two more times until you have several sheets that are about 8-inches long x 4-inches wide. This doesn't matter too much—the bigger the sheets, the larger the flowers. Stack 8 pieces of cut tissue paper together (you can use all the same color or multiple colors).
- Starting on the short end make a 1/2-inch thick fold.
- Flip the tissue paper over so the folded side is down and then take the folded piece up and fold it again so now the fold is on the top, like an accordion.
- Keep working your way up, folding back and forth until all the tissue paper is folded.
- Bend the pipe cleaner around the middle of the stack and twist to secure. This will be your stem.
- Cut each edge, either in a triangular shape or rounded. Then fan out the paper.
- Now pull one layer of tissue paper at a time towards the middle, carefully peeling the pieces of paper apart to create a puffy flower.
- Continue with the remaining pieces of tissue paper to make as many flowers as you like. You can even make gigantic ones to hang from the ceiling using full sheets of tissue paper.



Supplies Needed

- 5 pipe cleaners
- 5 sheets of different color tissue paper
- scissors



Papel Picado

Directions

- Cut paper into square sheets.
- Fold paper in half, and a half again.
- Cut out whatever pattern you'd like out of the bottom half.
- Open it and fold down.
- Fold diagonally and cut out shapes.
- Fold top side over twine and secure with tape. Hang and enjoy!



Supplies Needed

- 5-10 sheets of tissue or crepe paper of various colors
- scissors
- thread or twine
- Scotch tape

WANT TO LEARN MORE? CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS AND WEBSITES!

Refer to emailed PDF to access links below.

[A Gift for Abuelita: Celebrating the Day of the Dead](#)

By Nancy Luenn (author) and Robert Chapman (illustrator) Age: 6-9 Reading Level: Independent Reader

[Calavera Abecedario: A Day of the Dead Alphabet Book](#)

By Jeanette Winter Age: 3-6 Reading Level: Pre-Reader

[Day of the Dead](#)

By Tony Johnston (author) and Jeanette Winter (illustrator) Age: 6-9 Reading Level: Beginning Reader

[Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera: Their Lives and Ideas, 24 Activities](#)

By Carol Sabbeth Age: 6-9 Reading Level: Independent Reader

[National Museum of Mexican Art](#)

Sólo un poco aquí: Day of the Dead

Taking place virtually this year

Friday, September 18 through December 13, 2020

Watch the Virtual Day of the Dead Kick Off that took place on September 18th [here](#).

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/day-of-the-dead/id884153850> (half in English/Spanish)

SHARE WITH US!

Once you've set up your altar and decorated for Day of the Dead, share your photos with us at <https://www.girlscoutsgcnwi.org/en/our-council/ourstories.html>! These photos could be shared on GSGCNWI's Facebook page on November 2 or in a future GSGCNWI blog post.

