

What is Día de Los Muertos?

Día de Los Muertos takes place between Oct. 31 and ends on Nov. 2. Día de Los Muertos is a remembrance and celebration of life. Family and friends gather over multiple days to honor, respect, and remember those who have passed on. The celebration varies from region to region and pueblo to pueblo in Mexico. Similarly, participation in the U.S varies as well. Many of us celebrate by creating ofrendas (altars) for a temporary period, visit cemeteries to clean grave-sites and take flowers. There is so much information on Día de Los Muertos, thus I will provide some informational links for those who are interested to know more: [NPR](#) and [Nat'l Geo](#).

What is an ofrenda (altar)?

A cornerstone is the creation of ofrendas (altars). The altars are created in homes and cemeteries and not meant for worship. Altars can take multiple creative forms through a wide spectrum of dedications, depending on one's creative desire. The altar includes the four main elements of nature – Earth, Wind, Water and Fire, in addition to photos, objects that serve as a reminder of loved ones.

How can I participate?

I welcome you to add a photo of a love one or pet, favorite item or objects that serve as a reminder of their lives, and/or a piece that symbolizes earth, fire, water, wind. There are many examples of what can be added to an altar, the important thing is that it is meaningful to you! Below are some examples.

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: Paper- Mache (papel picado) 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. Candles represent fire and are a light guiding them back to visit the land of the living.
- **Copal** – Incense burned to commemorate Pre-Columbian history.
- The **Cempasuchiti-Marigold** known as “The flower of the dead” blossoms 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.
- **Monarchs** - they are believed to hold the spirits of the departed. This belief stems from the fact that the first monarchs arrive in Mexico for the winter each fall on Nov. 1, which coincides with Día de Los Muertos
- **Pictures** are widely used in honor of the individual you are paying homage to.

- **The Skull** – The common symbol of the holiday is the skull which is celebrated and represented by decorative masks called calacas. The skull is used not as morbid symbol but rather as a whimsical reminder of the cyclical nature of life, which is why they are brightly decorated.
- **Dogs:** Dogs were believed to guide the ancestral spirits to their final resting place in the afterlife.