

## Day of the Dead

Although the ritual has since been merged with Catholic theology, it still maintains the basic principles of the Aztec ritual, such as the use of skulls. Today, people don wooden skull masks called calacas and dance in honor of their deceased relatives. The wooden skulls are also placed on altars that are dedicated to the dead. Sugar skulls, made with the names of the dead person on the forehead, are eaten by a relative or friend.

The Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations kept skulls as trophies and displayed them during the ritual. The skulls were used to symbolize death and rebirth.

The skulls were used to honor the dead, whom the Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations believed came back to visit during the month-long ritual.

Unlike the Spaniards, who viewed death as the end of life, the natives viewed it as the continuation of life. Instead of fearing death, they embraced it. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake.

"The pre-Hispanic people honored duality as being dynamic," said Christina Gonzalez, senior lecturer on Hispanic issues at Arizona State University. "They didn't separate death from pain, wealth from poverty like they did in Western cultures."

However, the Spaniards considered the ritual to be sacrilegious. They perceived the indigenous people to be barbaric and pagan.

In their attempts to convert them to Catholicism, the Spaniards tried to kill the ritual.

But like the old Aztec spirits, the ritual refused to die.

To make the ritual more Christian, the Spaniards moved it so it coincided with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day (Nov. 1 and 2), which is when it is celebrated today.

Previously it fell on the ninth month of the Aztec Solar Calendar, approximately the beginning of August, and was celebrated for the entire month. Festivities were presided over by the goddess Mictecacihuatl. The goddess, known as "Lady of the Dead," was believed to have died at birth.

Today, Day of the Dead is celebrated in Mexico and in certain parts of the United States and Central America.

"It's celebrated different depending on where you go," Gonzalez said.

In general, the more urban the setting within Mexico the less religious and cultural importance is retained by observants, while the more rural and Indian the locality the greater the religious and economic import of the holiday. Because of this, this observance is usually of greater social importance in southern Mexico than in the northern part of the country.

In rural Mexico, people visit the cemetery where their loved ones are buried. They decorate gravesites with marigold flowers and candles. They bring toys for dead children and bottles of tequila to adults. They sit on picnic blankets next to gravesites and eat the favorite food of their loved ones.

In the United States and in Mexico's larger cities, families build altars in their homes, dedicating them to the dead. They surround these altars with flowers, food and pictures of the deceased. They light candles and place them next to the altar.

This is an ancient festivity that has been much transformed through the years, but which was intended in prehispanic Mexico to celebrate children and the dead. Hence, the best way to describe this Mexican holiday is to say that it is a time when Mexican families remember their dead, and the continuity of life.

Source:

Miller, Carlos. "Indigenous people wouldn't let 'Day of the Dead' die." azcentral.com. 2005.

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/history/>

## Day of the Dead glossary

Rather than a time of mourning, Day of the Dead - observed every Nov. 1 and 2 - is a celebration of life and death, when the spirits of the dearly departed return to Earth for a family fiesta. Actually that's just a skeletal summary of the happy holiday. In order to experience the full meal deal, we suggest you get smart on what it's all about before the celebration. So here's the 411 on the basic elements:

### Ofrenda

While some prefer to visit the graves of loved ones, others build an ofrenda (offering), or altar, in their home. It consists of a photo of the one being honored; prayer candles in purple for pain, white for hope and pink for the celebration; pan de los muertos (bread of the dead), a sweetened bread baked in round loaves or skull shapes; marigolds; sugar skulls; papel picado (Mexican tissue-paper decorations); copal (incense to clear the path for spirits return); a glass of water and a bottle of beer.

### Calaveras

These whimsical renditions of skulls and skeletons are used in many forms of artwork, toys and mini-shadowboxes.

### La Catrina

This popular Muertos image was created by Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913). It was modeled in the French style, after the ladies of the early 1900s.

### Graveyards

In certain parts of Mexico, family members gather at the graves of their loved ones and build the altar by the headstone rather than in their home.

### Cempazuchitl

Also known as "the flower with 400 lives," marigolds were thought by the Aztec Indians to symbolize death. It is believed that the scent of the petals forms a welcome path for the spirits to return to their altar or grave.

### Sugar skulls

Molded from a sugar paste, then decorated with icing, glitter and foil, these skulls often are placed on altars. The sugar represents the sweetness of life, and the skull represents the sadness of death.

*alfenique* - a special confection used to fashion skulls, fruits and other figures.

*altar de muertos* - the offering that family and/or friends prepare for their dead loved ones

*angelitos* - the souls of the children who have died, literally "little angels"

*arco* - decorated arch sometimes placed on the graves or on the altar de muertos

*atole* - an ancient drink made from corn meal and water flavored with various fruits.

*calacas* - whimsical skeleton figures that represent death

*calavera* - a skull, also a slang term for "daredevil"

*calaveras* - songs and poems about the festival

*calaveritas de azúcar* - sugar skulls made for the Día de los Muertos

*careta* - mask worn by dancers to scare the dead away at the end of the celebrations

*catrina* - Famed Día de los Muertos artist José Guadalupe Posada's icon of death. Catrina means: a wealthy woman, it is said in a sarcastic manner.

*cempazuchitl* - a yellow marigold, the symbol of death, also known as Cempasuchil or zempasuchitl

*copalli* - a scented resin used to make incense

*Día de los Muertos* - Day of the Dead

*Día Todos los Santos* - All Saints' Day

*golletes* - A doughnut shaped bread, glazed with pink colored sugar that is placed on the altar.

*Iluminación* - The ceremony that takes place in the cemetery, where hundreds of candles are lighted to guide the souls to their altars.

*mole* - a thick sauce made from a variety of ingredients including chilis, sesame seeds, herbs, spices, chocolate/fruit.

*ofrenda* - an offering, refers to the goods set out on the altars

*pan de los muertos* - bread of the dead

*papel picado* - colorful tissue paper with intricate, festive designs cut out

Source:

Cano-Murillo, Kathy. Azcentral.com. 2005.

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/history/flashcards.html>,

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/glossary/>.

## Day of the Dead Recipes

One of the most celebrated traditions in Mexico is the Day of the Dead. On this occasion, unique dishes are prepared, and the relatives cook for the enjoyment of the deceased. The culinary offerings are the centerpieces of the altar, which is decorated with cempasuchitl flowers. The fragrance of the flowers blends with the aroma of burnt copal.

### **Typical of Oaxaca – Fruit Atole (Hot drink made from corn starch and fruit)**

#### **Ingredients:**

10 cups milk  
½ lb. sugar  
2 lb. of any kind of fruit  
1 stick of cinnamon  
1/8 tsp. baking soda  
1 cup corn starch

#### **Preparation:**

Wash, cut, and boil the fruit in water until it is soft.

Drain and transfer to a blender.

In a saucepan, combine the strained fruit, milk, sugar, and baking soda.

Dissolve the corn starch in some water and combine it with the rest of the ingredients. Set the mixture over low heat, stirring constantly until it thickens.

Add sugar to taste before mixture begins to boil.

Remove, let cool, and drink.

Source:

Andrade, Mary. Dayofthedead.com. 2006. <http://www.dayofthedead.com/Recipe.html>.

PAN DE MUERTOS  
DAY OF THE DEAD BREAD  
ALL SOULS BREAD

This is a version of the bread that is made for the November 2 celebration known as the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in Mexico. You can also mold the bread into different shapes like angels and animals.

**Ingredientes - Ingredients:**

- Una taza y media de harina - 1 1/2 cups of flour
- Media taza de azúcar - 1/2 cup of sugar
- Una cucharadita de sal - 1 teaspoon of salt
- Una cucharada de semillas de anís - 1 tablespoon of anise seed
- Dos paquetitos de levadura - 2 packets of dry yeast
- Media taza de leche - 1/2 cup of milk
- Media taza de agua - 1/2 cup of water
- Media taza de mantequilla - 1/2 cup of butter
- Cuatro huevos - 4 eggs
- Entre tres y cuatro y media tazas de harina - from 3 - 4 1/2 cups of flour

**Preparation:**

Mix all dry ingredients together except the 3 - 4 1/2 cups of flour.

In a small pan, heat the milk, the water, and the butter. Add the liquid mixture to the dry mixture. Beat well.

Mix in the eggs and 1 1/2 cups of flour. Beat well.

Put in the rest of the flour, little by little.

Knead the mixture on a floured board for 9 - 10 minutes.

Put the dough in a greased bowl and allow it to rise until it has doubled in size (about an hour and a half at sea level).

Punch the dough down and reshape it with some "bone" shapes on top to decorate it. Let it rise another hour.

Bake at 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) for about 40 minutes.

After baking, sprinkle it with confectioner's sugar and colored sugar.

**Preparación:**

Mezcle todos los ingredientes secos menos las 3 - 4 1/2 tazas de harina.

En una olla caliente la leche, el agua y la mantequilla. Añada la mezcla líquida a la mezcla de ingredientes secos.

Bátalo bien.

Agregue los huevos y una taza y media de harina. Bátalo bien.

Agregue el resto de la harina poco a poco.

Sobre una tabla enharinada, amase por unos 9 - 10 minutos la mezcla.

Ponga la masa en un recipiente engrasado, y deje que levante hasta que haya doblado su tamaño (aproximadamente hora y media al nivel del mar).

Para que la masa se encoja, déle puñetazos y fórmela de nuevo con unos "huesos" de masa encima para decorarla.

Deje que levante una hora más.

Hornee a 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) por unos 40 minutos.

Después de hornearlo, espolvoréele azúcar glas y azúcar coloreado.

Source:

Graber, Karen Hursh. Mexconnect.com. 1996-2007.

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/recipes/puebla/kgpandemuertos.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/recipes/puebla/kgpandemuertos.html).

## **Day of the Dead Websites**

### **Oaxaca:**

<http://www.dayofthedead.com/TraditionSadandJoy.html>

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/mdiaz/mdmuertos.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/mdiaz/mdmuertos.html)

### **Mexico City:**

<http://www.dayofthedead.com/TraditionSkulls.html>

### **Various sites:**

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/jking/jkdayofthedead.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/jking/jkdayofthedead.html)

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/dpalfrey/dpofrendas.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/dpalfrey/dpofrendas.html)

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/muertos.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/muertos.html)

interactive: <http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/altar/>