

“There is nothing more important for life, even for material life, than the strong and sure realization of communion with the spiritual world.”

“Those who have passed through the gate of death have not ceased to be present; it is only that our eyes have ceased to see them. They are there in very truth.” -- Rudolf Steiner

The Dead Are With Us – Nüremberg, February 10, 1918

How do we live with the dead as if they were our daily companions? Creating an altar in one's home that honors the dead is a common practice for many of the world's human beings. In the Mexican tradition of *Día de los Muertos*, the altar or *Ofrenda* becomes a community altar of all different sizes and styles. Co-created by peoples of the earthly realm for the peoples of the spirit world, our memories are the golden thread that we use to find one another again, reminding us that community is still possible even over the threshold.

We will be co-creating an *Ofrenda* during our time together. Please do some remembering ahead of time and bring some items to contribute, in honor of your person or people. There are no rules or limits to who you choose to honor, only that they have passed through the threshold. Below are some ideas and Mexican traditions for the *Ofrenda* that might inspire you.

The *Ofrenda* (Altar) for *Día de los Muertos* includes personal items like photos and favorite foods of the departed, alongside symbolic elements such as marigolds, candles, sugar skulls, water, salt, and copal incense to welcome and honor the spirits of loved ones.

Personal Items

- Photographs: A prime spot is reserved for photos of the deceased to draw their souls to the altar.
- Favorite Foods and Drinks: Include the departed's most cherished foods, and sweets, beverages, and even a specific brand of alcohol to make them feel at home.
- Personal Belongings: Place personal items and favorite toys (for children) on the altar that represent the deceased's life and interests.

Symbolic Elements, The Four Elements

- *Cempasúchil* (Marigolds): The vibrant color and strong scent are believed to attract and guide the spirits to the *Ofrenda*.

- Candles: Lighting the path for the spirits to find their way to the living world.
- Water: Placed to quench the thirst of souls who have traveled a long distance.
- Salt: Represents the purification of the soul and is one of the four elements.
- Copal Incense: Burned to purify the air and further guide the spirits to the altar with its smoke and scent.
- Sugar Skulls (*Calaveras*): Symbolize the sweetness of life and the cyclical nature of life and death.
- *Papel Picado*: Colorful, perforated paper banners with cut-out designs that add decoration and represent the air element.

Other Common Items

- *Pan de Muerto*: A sweet, round bread often flavored with anise and orange peel, a staple at *Ofrenda*
- Fruit and Vegetables: Many fruits and vegetables are placed on the altar as they are associated with the autumn harvest season.
- Religious Symbols and Art: Items such as crosses, photos of saints, and angels, poetry, prayers, drawings, paintings, music are also often included.
- Monarch Butterflies: These butterflies are often included as they are believed to represent the souls of the departed.