

# DAY OF THE DEAD ALTARS



## OFRENDA

A memorial altar is where returning souls will first be met and welcomed. It usually consists of a table placed in front of a background that has been decorated with marigolds and other flowers, as well as fruits and vegetables.



Traditionally, *ofrendas* include basic items that represent the four elements: water, fire, earth, and wind. Most also contain personal items that belonged to the person being honored, as well as skull and skeleton toys, candy, and folk art that is prevalent in all aspects of Day of the Dead festivities.



Flowers: The traditional flower of the dead is the Cemapasúchil or marigold. Its petals and aromas are used to help guide the spirits home.

Candles: One for each soul being honored, they guide the souls to their homes and altars.



Papel picado: Paper banners that represent the wind and the fragility of life.

References to the deceased: Such as photographs and/or personal belongings of the souls being honored.



Glass of water: To quench the thirst of the souls on their journey back.



Dish of salt: To purify the air and the soul of the deceased.



Copal: Ceremonially burned incense, represents the journey from life to death, and turns away evil spirits.



Food: Such as fruits and vegetables (representing the earth), rice, mole, and the deceased's favorite foods.



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Pan de muerto or bread of the dead: A semisweet bread baked in the shape of bones; it is an offering for the deceased and for visitors as well.

Skeleton and skull imagery: These are featured prominently, often irreverently.




Sugar skulls: Crafted from pure sugar, they represent the deceased in the family.

## COLORS USED IN DAY OF THE DEAD ALTARS

 Purple: Symbolizes pain, suffering, grief, and mourning. It is used to acknowledge the death of a loved one.

 Orange and yellow: The colors of marigolds, they represent the sun and light.

 Black: Often used as a background color, it represents death.

 White: Represents purity, hope, and renewal.

 Pink: Represents joy and celebration.

 Red: Represents blood of life.



Altar by Animal Samaritans for Sunnylands Center and Gardens, October 2020



Altar by Palm Springs Art Museum for Sunnylands Center and Gardens, October 2020

## CREATE A MINI OFRENDA TO HONOR A LOVED ONE

You can use materials you have at home to create a mini altar: A cardboard box, scraps of paper and items to represent the person being remembered.

