



Día de los Muertos (“Day of the Dead”) A Toolbox

Día de los Muertos, also known as “Day of the Dead” is a beloved Mexican holiday that celebrates the memories of ancestors and deceased family members much like a joyful family reunion.

The celebration originated in ancient Mesoamérica (Mexico and northern Central America) where indigenous groups, including Aztec, Maya and Toltec, had specific times when they commemorated their loved ones who had passed away. Certain months were dedicated to remembering the departed, based on whether the deceased was an adult or a child. The holiday is now celebrated in the U. S., Mexico and parts of Central and South America on November 1 and 2. November 1 is often the day set aside to remember children who have passed away. November 2 is for adults.

The event is a celebration of life, not death. The ancients believed new life comes from death; the celebration is a recognition that death is part of life’s journey, and is often associated with the cyclical aspects of agriculture.

Greeley has its own *Día de los Muertos* celebration, hosted through the Greeley Creative District, which is held on the last Saturday of October. The following are some ways to appreciate the symbols and celebrations associated with this special way to honor those who have died.



SYMBOL

Altars (Ofrendas):

Temporary altars may be set up and adorned with mementos of significance to the departed person. Altars also typically have objects that symbolize earth's elements: water, wind, earth and fire;

Water: to quench the thirst of the returning loved one;

Wind: is represented by papel picado, traditional paper banners;

Earth: is food to satisfy their hunger, especially bread;

Fire: is symbolized with candles, often formed in the shape of a cross, so spirits can find their way home.



IDEAS

Set up a table for a display of mementos that were important to those who are to be remembered. Examples include pictures of the person, items representing their favorite pastimes, instruments, items of clothing, and letters could all be assembled to honor their memory. Candles or a light helps guide the relative to their loved ones. Their favorite foods can be placed on the altar. Altars often have multiple levels, depicting spiritual levels but how simple or elaborate is up to you! Displays can honor one person, a family or a group, or can be for those who have died in a disaster, in a tragedy, or because of an ailment.



ACTIVITY . SYMBOL

Skeletons (Calaveras)

Skeletons play an important part of the day and serve as a reminder that death is simply part of life as well as something we all have in common.

Adorning skeleton faces with flowers, bright colors, and decorations or dressing up skeletons in festive garb offers a joyful way to celebrate memories of those who have passed away. It is common to see life-size papier-mâché skeletons and miniature plastic or clay skeletons, as well as sugar skulls.



IDEAS

Decorate skulls to place at the altar, on a table, on a wall or door to a room or office, or at an entryway to a business.

Skulls can be made of paper, papier-mâché, ceramics, or plastic. They can be made into masks or painted on pumpkins, food, clay pots, and faces.



ACTIVITY. SYMBOL

Flowers, Butterflies, & Sugar Skulls:

Cempasúchil is a type of marigold native to Mexico; its strong scent and bright color are thought to mark a path to lead spirits back to their families.

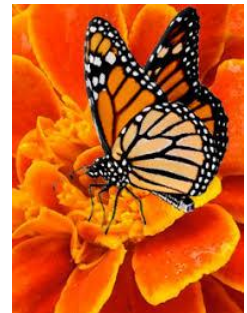
The *Monarch butterfly* is believed to hold the spirits of the departed, a belief reinforced with the arrival of the monarchs to Mexico on November 1st for the winter. *Calaveritas de azúcar* are sugar skulls, often placed with toys and left on the altars of children.



IDEAS

Place marigolds on the altar, lining a path to a house, as a hair piece, in bouquets, or to adorn a table setting. Roses are also a favorite flower to include in decorations and dress.

Butterfly objects, as well as sugar skulls, can also be used to decorate a person, home, or altar.



ACTIVITY. SYMBOL

Costumes & Clothing

Dressing up to enjoy a day of celebration can be simple or elaborate. Many celebrants like to adorn elaborate face painting to go with their outfits; for others, a t-shirt with a symbol will do. This is a joyful day of remembering and connecting with those who meant something special ... dress for the events of the day or evening!



IDEAS

From head to toe, there are endless ways to dress for the occasion—hats, headbands, face-painting, traditional garb, accessories get creative!

