

DÍA DE MUERTOS



Despite the name, Día de los Muertos is a celebration of life. Popularized in the American mainstream by the Disney movie, *Coco*, its roots are in ancient Indigenous traditions of Meso-America. In some regions and cultures, it was a month-long celebration of life and death, a time when the realms of life and after-life blended together.

When the Spanish came to the New World, they mixed Indigenous customs with the Catholic traditions of All Souls' Day and All Saints' Day. This was so they could convert more Indigenous people to Christianity. It resulted in a shorter celebration: November 1st for people who died as children and November 2nd to honor adults who died.



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SUGAR SKULLS

Before the Spanish invasion, Indigenous peoples in Meso-America kept real bones as reminders that we all are the same in the afterlife, and even as offerings to the gods of death. After the invasion, the Spanish brought the tradition of making sugar sculptures. Through “syncretization” or the mixing of different cultures to create a new culture, the practice of making and decorating sugar skulls came to be. Sugar skulls can represent the souls of our dearly departed. People will decorate them thinking of a loved one that has passed and may even write their names on them. Decorate your sugar skull to keep the tradition alive and adapt it to what is beautiful and meaningful for you!



SYMBOLISM IN ALTARS

Every part of an altar has a meaning.

Photos and memorabilia of our dearly departed call them to the altar so they will be remembered. The levels of an altar symbolize the realms of life and the afterlife. **Calaveras** symbolize the balance of grief and joy in remembering the people we lost.

Copal may look like a lump of burning coal, but it is a traditional incense called copallin in Nahuatl. Because of its strong aroma Copal is used as a call to the spirits to come to the land of the living.

An **arch** made of marigold flowers symbolizes the entryway between life and the afterlife.

Cempaxochitls (marigolds) with their strong scent and bright colors help guide lost souls to the celebrations.

The **4 elements** are symbolized through copal (earth and fire), candles (wind and fire), flowers (earth and water), water, and papel picado (wind).

Putting things that the deceased loved on their altar make them feel comfortable to rest and celebrate.



Food is left on an ofrenda to let the spirits recover from the journey to the world of the living.

Water and the favorite **drinks** of the deceased help replenish them.



Mirrors and a bowl of water, are a way for souls to fix their appearance after the long journey to prepare for a night of parties and fun.

MAKING SUGAR SKULLS

STEPS

1. First, get a bowl to do make the mix
2. For every 1 cup of sugar, add 1 teaspoon of meringue, and 1 teaspoon of water.
 - a. Recommended to mix the dry ingredients first, and ensure they are integrated completely with each other, then add the water.
3. Mix thoroughly, making sure there are no unmixed portions in the bowl. The consistency should feel like damp sand, if its too wet add sugar and meringue, if it's not clumping enough, add meringue and water
4. Tightly pack the mix into your mold, it is important that the sugar is packed without empty space in the mold.
5. Put a hard square surface to the back of the mold and flip it over and lift the mold from the new sculpture. We generally use squares of cardboard.
6. If you have enough space to airdry your skulls, leave it out to dry for at least 24hrs, 48 hrs to ensure it has solidified inside completely.
7. If you want to speed up the process, heat an oven to 250 degrees farenheit, and insert your skulls for 10 minutes. You can leave them on the cardboard and on baking trays without fear of burning the cardboard! Depending on your oven and the mix, the time or temperature may need to be adjusted.
8. The skulls should be ready to decorate once dry and solidified!

MATERIALS

- white refined sugar
- meringue powder
- skull mold
- water
- bowls
- trays
- oven (optional)
- cardboard squares
- measuring cup
- measuring teaspoon