

The basics

When is it celebrated?

The celebration is from October 31 to November 2. It is believed that the souls of children visit the earth between October 31 and November 1, and that adults do so between November 1 and 2. The Catholic celebration for All Saints' Day (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2) occurs during this time.

How is it celebrated?

Customs vary, but can include traditional Catholic rituals such as going to mass and praying a rosary for the dead -- and popular traditions -- such as cleaning and decorating the graves of loved ones or setting up altars at home to honor them.



Photos and other objects: Photos of the deceased and objects that belonged to him are included to remember the loved one.



Skull: In the form of puppets, toys, candy or figurines that represent daily life (work, marriage, singers), skull art is a reminder of the transience of life and the certainty of death.



The catrina: It is a skeleton wearing a wide-brimmed hat and commonly dressed in women's clothing from Mexican high society from the late 19th century and early 20th century. The style satirizes those who favored European culture over Mexican food and tradition. It was popularized in images by the great Mexican illustrator José Guadalupe Posada.

A look at the Day of the Dead altar

Skulls and skeletons adorned with colorful flowers, wedding dresses or made of sugar with extravagant designs: These are the representations of the Day of the Dead, a tradition in Mexico and Latin America.

Unlike Halloween, the Day of the Dead is not about feeling fear or sadness, but rather a time to remember departed loved ones.

"The Day of the Dead is something very sacred. It is a day in which we welcome the memory and souls of those people who in some way are still among us as part of our family, even though they are physically no longer here." with us," said Cesáreo Moreno, chief curator of the National Museum of Mexican Art (read the full story here.), "And it is a sacred day in which many people pray. They gather and welcome them. On Halloween we do not want "those ghosts to haunt you. You kind of fear them. It's a day to be scared. In short, it's not a sacred day and I think those are the big differences between both celebrations."

In Latin America, traditions for the Day of the Dead are passed from generation to generation, but in the United States this celebration is relatively new. In California, some activists began organizing processions and altar displays for Dia de los Muertos in the 1960s and 1970s as a way to honor Mexican-American heritage. More recently, Day of the Dead-related products began appearing in stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, and Crate and Barrel.

On the altar

The altar is one of the most unique ways to celebrate Dia de los Muertos. An altar is made in honor of the deceased and can be installed in a grave or in the house. It is made with food, drink and the things that the deceased appreciated most. "The altar is a good example of the fusion between religion and culture," said Eric García, coordinator of Arte Ambulante at the National Museum of Mexican Art. "These altars pay tribute to both indigenous and Catholic beliefs for life after death and place it logically."

The structure

An altar can be installed on tables, shelves and drawers. The order of the three levels refers to indigenous and Catholic beliefs:

Main level Symbolizes Paradise (where God and the saints live)

Intermediate Represents the earth (where people live)

Lower level Symbolizes Mictlan (the Aztec underworld of the dead)



Offerings

The offerings or gifts are placed on different levels of the altar, and are usually things to honor and welcome back home the spirit of the loved one who passed away.



Incense: It is made of copal, which is pine resin, and is used to communicate with the spiritual world.



Cempasuchil flowers: Orange in color and with a penetrating smell, they guide souls from paradise to earth. Petals are scattered on the floor to direct souls toward the altar.



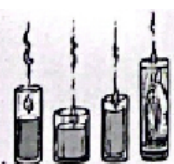
Bread of the dead: A sweet gift for the spirit. The design on the upper part simulates skulls and skeletons.



Food: The deceased's favorite dishes are included for them to taste and represent the earth element



Water and other drinks: Quench the thirst of the spirits that are believed to travel to earth for a day.



Candles: They represent fire to attract spirits to the altar.



Papel picado: It is tissue paper with a complex design that represents wind and fragility, and is used as decoration for festive occasions throughout the year. Includes images of skulls for Day of the Dead.