



DAY OF THE DEAD 2017

How to make a Day of the Dead altar

Traditional Day of the Dead altars are built in private homes or public spaces in Mexico as a way of honouring the life of an individual, or to offer remembrance to a person's family or ancestry. The altars are tiered, with the central image of the person to be remembered placed on the top level, below which are placed an assortment of candles, flowers and *calaveras de azúcar* (miniature sugar skulls). The lost soul is believed to return to the altar to enjoy the feast left there by its loved ones.

The altars range in size and complexity. To create your own simple altar to commemorate Mexico's killed and disappeared journalists and writers, follow these steps:

1. Build the tiered base for your altar using boxes or wood (shoe boxes will do). This base is traditionally covered in **papel picado**, or brightly coloured tissue paper. Important colours to use include purple (signifying pain), white (for hope) and pink (for celebration).
2. A **photograph** of the person or people to be remembered is placed on the top level. For photos of the print journalists and writers killed and disappeared in Mexico since 2006 which you can print and use in your altars, see list attached.
3. On the lower tiers are placed an assortment of symbolic items: a bowl of **water** is used to represent life and purity; **candles** are used to represent light, faith and hope; and a feast of **fruit** and **pan de muerto** (special bread made for Day of the



Dead) is placed on the altar for the returning spirits to enjoy. Brightly coloured **flowers**, in particular **marigolds**, are either placed in a vase or their petals are spread across the altar. The flowers are used to guide each soul to its own altar. The **calaveras de azúcar** (miniature sugar skulls) are placed on the lower tiers. These skulls are meant to represent the dead soul and are used to honour the return of the spirit to the altar. Often the name of the person to be remembered is engraved on the forehead of the skull.

4. You may also want to add some **journalistic or writing tools** such as pens, notebooks or press credentials to indicate the profession of the writers being commemorated.
5. **Incense** is lit on the altar. This incense is believed to clear the air of any negative energy, helping the spirit to return to the altar.

In more elaborate altars, an archway of flowers is also built to symbolise the passage between life and death.



For further instructions on how altars are built, see the following websites:

- http://dia-de-los-muertos.123holiday.net/dia_de_los_muertos_alter.html
- http://gomexico.about.com/od/festivalsholidays/ht/make_altar.htm
- <http://blog.exploreandgomexico.com/how-to-build-a-day-of-the-dead-altar/>

To view images of a range of elaborate Day of the Dead altars see

- <http://gomexico.about.com/od/dayofthedead/ig/Day-of-the-Dead-Altar-Photos/>
- <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/Search/Search.aspx?contractUrl=2&language=en-GB&family=creative&assetType=image&p=day+of+the+dead+altar#>

For an explanation of how to make *pan de muerto* (Day of the Dead bread), see:

<http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/2378-day-of-the-dead-bread-pan-de-muertos>