



DAY OF THE DEAD 2023

How to build a Day of the Dead altar

Traditional Day of the Dead altars, found in private homes or public spaces in Mexico, serve to honour the life of individuals who passed away, or pay tribute to their family or ancestry. The altars feature the central image of the person being remembered at the top level, accompanied by candles, flowers and *calaveras de azúcar* (miniature sugar skulls). It is believed that the departed soul is returned to the altar to partake in the feast left there by their loved ones.

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

1. Build a tiered base using boxes or wood (shoe boxes will do). This base is traditionally covered in *papel picado*, brightly coloured tissue paper. Suggested colours include purple (signifying pain), white (for hope) and pink (for celebration).
2. Place a **photograph** of the person or people being remembered on the top level.
3. Arrange an assortment of symbolic items on the lower tiers: a bowl of **water** to represent life and purity; **candles** to represent light, faith and hope; and a feast of **fruit** and *pan de muerto* (special bread made for Day of the Dead) for the returning spirits to enjoy. Place brightly coloured **flowers** (used to guide each soul to its own altar), in particular **marigolds**, in a vase, or spread their petals across the altar. Place the *calaveras de azúcar* (miniature sugar skulls) on the lower tiers (these represent the dead soul and are used to honour the return of the spirit to the altar). Engrave the name of the person being remembered 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 those being commemorated.
5. Lit **incense** on the altar. This is believed to clear the air of any negative energy, helping the spirit return to the altar.

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

