

## Appendix A:

### More Information on Altars and Offerings

Excerpt from "The Ofrenda"

<https://dayofthedead.holiday/traditions/the-ofrenda>

*Ofrendas* consists of a set of items that honor the person to whom it is dedicated along with staples of the celebration such a *pan de muerto*, a traditional sugary pastry adorned with bone and skull shapes made from the same bread, and marigold petals. A typical altar will consist of 2 or 3 tabletop levels, with two levels, by using a smaller flat surface on top. All of that will be covered by a bright-colored tablecloth and adorned with many personal items of remembrance. Photographs, personal items, and food items they particularly enjoyed are also included to help the living remember them. For children, it is common to place toys on the altar. In some places, they are even remembered separately as *angelitos* (little angels) on the day before. The lower portion of the altar usually includes food offerings that are the favorites of the deceased. Tamales, mole, fruit and sugarcane are favorites, as well as *calaveritas de azúcar* (sugar skulls) and *pan de muerto*.

It is at its core a way to remember loved ones by sharing a meal with them as one would when they were alive.

### The Design of the Altars

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ofrenda>

An altar, for an *ofrenda*, contains three levels or tiers. The topmost tier identifies the dead person who is being invited to the altar, frequently with photos of the deceased, along with **images of various saints**, statuettes of the Virgin Mary, crucifixes, etc. which are positioned in a *retablo* which forms the back of the altar; on the second tier are things placed to encourage the dead to feel at home and welcome: the deceased person's favorite food items might go here, including such things as *mole*, candy, *pan dulce*, and especially a sweet bread called *pan de muerto*. For deceased adults, the *ofrenda* might include a bottle or poured shot glasses of *tequila* or *mezcal*, while if the deceased is a child a favorite toy might be placed here. The bottom-most tier almost always contains lit candles, and might also have a washbasin, mirror, soap, and a towel so that the spirit of the deceased can see and refresh themselves upon arrival at the altar. Placed throughout the altar are *calaveras* (decorated candied skulls made from compressed sugar) and bright orange and yellow marigolds (*cempazuchitl*), an Aztec flower of the dead. *Ofrendas* are constructed in the home as well as in village cemeteries and churches.

The *ofrenda* typically features types of decorations that are representative of the four elements: earth, water, wind, and fire. For example, candles are lit on the table to symbolize the element of fire. Incense from the resin of copal trees are also used in the offering in order to produce smells that will scare away evil spirits.