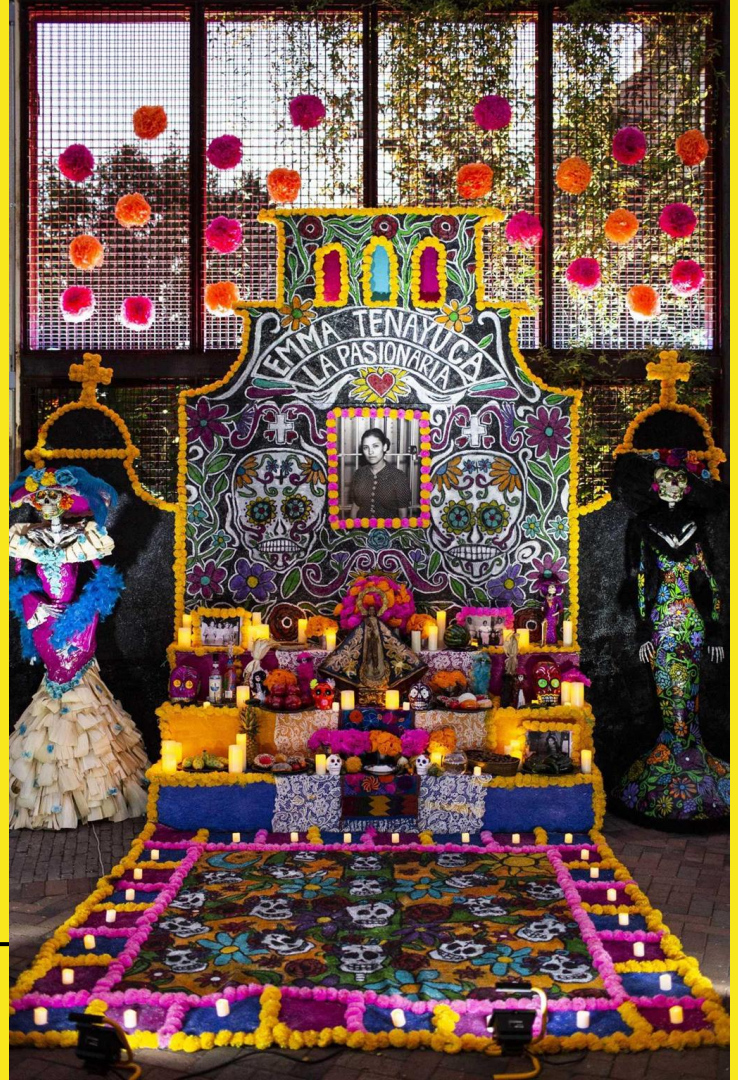




Día de los Muertos Ofrendas Y Altars

Traditional 3-Tier Altars



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. Throughout the altar are placed *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.**

Can you see any of the four elements represented here?





Dia de los Muertos Ofrenda
Altar of Remembrance



Podcast
(5 min)



EXPLORE-SONORA

DIA DE LOS MUERTOS CELEBRATION

Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) is a Mexican celebration when families gather to honor the memory of deceased loved ones on November 1 and 2. Spirits are guided home to enjoy offerings left for them on meticulously crafted altars. Its roots are a fusion of traditions found in Europe and Mesoamerica, particularly the ancient Aztec Empire.

The altar is a complex creation with incredible symbolism as each element carries specific meaning. Here are the most important elements and what they mean.

Levels

"Ofrendas" can be made up of two, three or seven levels.

2 LEVELS

represent the division between the earth and the sky.

3 LEVELS

represent the sky, the earth and the underworld.

7 LEVELS

are the most common and relate to the seven levels that a soul must traverse before reaching heaven (or hell). It also relates to the Seven Deadly Sins.

Incense

A chalice with incense or copal (an aromatic tree resin used in indigenous ceremonies) is placed on the altar. It is a way to purify the souls of the dead and ward off evil spirits.

Water

A glass of water is often placed on the altar to quench the thirst of the deceased and strengthen them for their return journey.

Banquet

To celebrate the arrival of your deceased loved ones, a banquet of their favorite food and drink items is placed as an offering.

Salt

Salt is usually placed on a plate and stops the souls of the deceased from being corrupted by earthly temptations.

Typical Food

As well as the deceased's favorite food items, altars usually contain traditional Day of the Dead food items such as Pan de Muerto, mole, pumpkin, sugar cane, jicama and oranges - the fruits of the season.

Calaveras:

"Calaveras" or skulls are representations of deceased relatives. Made of sugar or chocolate and often consumed by kids after the celebration, they are an example of the Mexican ability to celebrate, mock and play with death.

White Cross:

A cross made of slaked lime is drawn on the ground under the altar. It originally represented the four cardinal points corresponding to the four elements. Now it is also a representation of the Christian cross.

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Fire

Fire in the form of candles and torches are symbols of our love for our deceased relatives and guiding lights for their spirits.

Paper

"Ofrendas" usually have "papel picado" or tissue paper, typically in yellow and purple, made into intricate designs. They are a representation of the union between life and death.

Flowers

Flowers are not just a beautiful visual addition to the altar.

YELLOW FLOWERS,

or cempasúchitl, are a guide for the spirits into the mortal world.

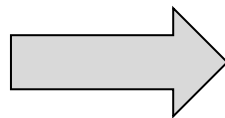
WHITE FLOWERS

represent the sky, while

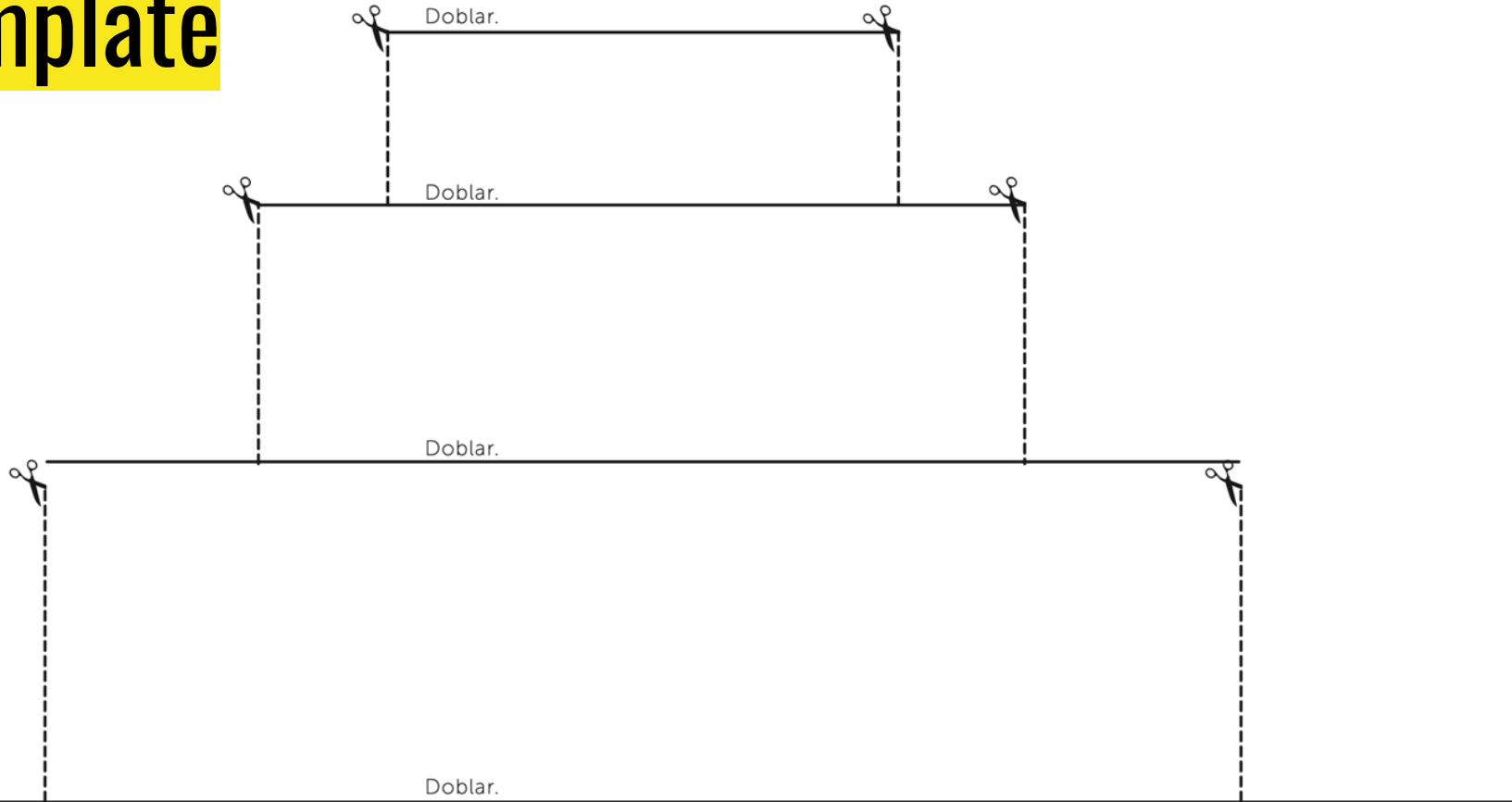
PURPLE FLOWERS

are the traditional color of mourning in Mexico.

You Can Follow This Traditional Design Or Make Your Own



Paper Altar Template

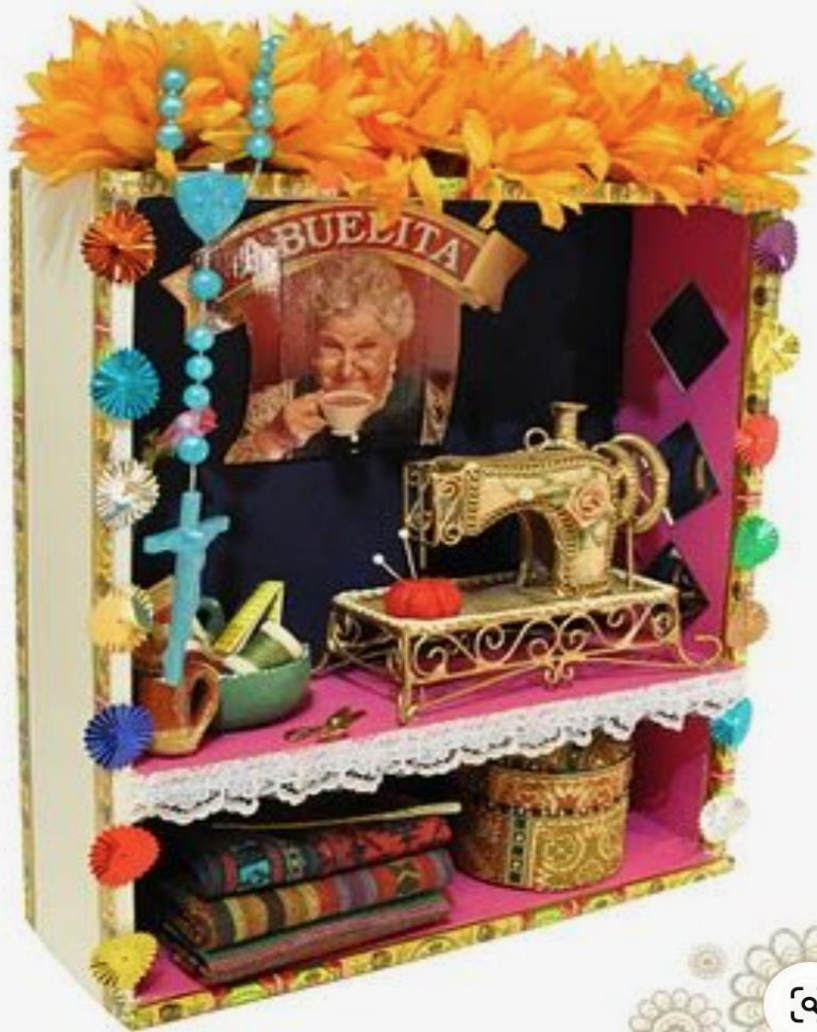


Tutorial



Shadow Box & Shoebox Altars





Cigar Box Altar



Mexico City





MACARIO GARCIA

