



Día de Los Muertos

"Dia de los Muertos" or Day of the Dead is a holiday, which is celebrated in Mexico. It is most similar to our Halloween festival.

November 2nd is the official date for Day of the Dead, although it is celebrated between October 31st and November 2nd. The best way to describe this holiday is that it is a time when family members who have died are remembered. In Mexico, this festival is considered to be the most important holiday of the year.

Although this celebration is associated with the dead, it is not sad or depressing, but rather a time full of life, happiness, color, food, family, and fun. There is excitement everywhere. In many areas, outdoor markets are displayed in which they sell many symbolic goods, such as special breads, flowers, pottery, baskets, candles, paper puppets, and candy skulls. The main symbols of this holiday are skulls and skeletons, which are displayed throughout the country. Scenes of skeletons hugging, marching, dancing, and laughing are seen in window displays on the streets. Flowers are another significant symbol for the Day of the Dead festivity.

People celebrate this holiday in their homes, as well as in the cemeteries. In their homes, between Oct. 31st and Nov. 2nd (a time called "Todos Santos"), offerings of food and drink are prepared for the dead. "Ofrendas" (offerings) are often set up on an altar displaying portraits, personal items, clothing, favorite foods, and other possessions of the deceased family member. Sometimes they are shown at the gravesites as well. On Nov. 2nd, family members visit the gravesites of their loved ones. They decorate their graves with flowers, enjoy picnics consisting of favorite foods of the deceased, and socially interact with others at the cemetery. The Mexicans see this as a very important holiday, as it shows the celebration of the life cycle. Sometimes, families stay at the graves all night with candles in hand. This time of year is very festive, and everyone talks of the dead as if they were still alive. During this time, people remember their family members and the joys of their lives.



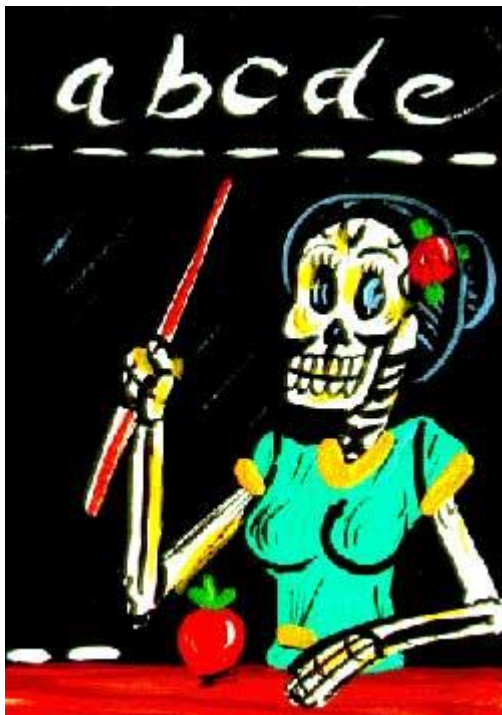
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The common foods eaten on this holiday include pan de los muertos ("bread of the dead"), which is flat bread baked in the shape of skulls and crossbones. Plastic toy skeletons are hidden by the baker in each loaf. Whoever bites into it will have good luck! People eat candies in the shape of coffins and skeletons.

Day of the Dead can range from a religious day to just a unique Mexican holiday celebrated with special foods and candy. Death is seen as life by all who celebrate the Day of the Dead. Families believe that whatever the deceased person liked, they will have again. That is why families enjoy their favorite foods and drinks in honor of the dead. The whole family comes together to celebrate this joyous time!

Prints of skeletons doing everyday activities are called calaveras in Mexico. *Calavera* means skull in Spanish and by extension, skeleton.

Make your own calavera doing what you love to do





Pan de Muerto (Bread of the Dead)

Ingredients

1/4 cup milk
1/4 cup (half a stick) butter, cut into 8 pieces
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 package active dry yeast
1/4 cup very warm water
2 eggs
3 cups all-purpose flour, unsifted
1/2 teaspoon anise seed
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons sugar



Instructions

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees

Bring milk to boil and remove from heat. Stir in butter, 1/4 cup sugar and salt.

In a large bowl, mix yeast & warm water until dissolved. Let stand 5 minutes before adding the milk mixture.

Separate the yolk and white of one egg. Add the yolk to the yeast mixture and save the white for later. Add the flour to the yeast and egg. Blend until a dough ball is formed.

Flour a work surface very well and place the dough in center. Knead until smooth. Return to a large bowl and cover with dish towel. Let rise in warm place for 90 minutes. Meanwhile, grease a baking sheet. Knead the dough again on floured surface. Divide the dough into fourths and set one fourth aside. Roll the remaining 3 pieces into "ropes."

On greased baking sheet, pinch 3 rope ends together and braid. Finish by pinching ends together on opposite side. Divide the remaining dough in half and form 2 "bones." Cross and lay them atop braided loaf.

Cover the bread with a dish towel and let rise for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, in a bowl, mix anise seed, cinnamon and 2 teaspoons of sugar. In another bowl, beat egg white lightly.

After 30 minutes, brush the top of bread with egg white and sprinkle with sugar mixture, except on cross bones. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

Makes 8 to 10 servings



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