

El Dia de los Muertos/Day of the Dead

More than 500 years ago, when the Spanish Conquistadors landed in what is now Mexico, they encountered natives practicing a ritual that seemed to mock death.

It was a ritual the indigenous people had been practicing at least 3,000 years, a ritual the Spaniards would try unsuccessfully to destroy.

El Dia de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead) dates from pre-Columbian times. It is believed by many that this is the time when those who have passed away are allowed to return to earth to visit with their families and friends.

This occasion, on Nov. 1 and 2, honors those who have died. In Mexico, the celebration includes decorating shop windows, cleaning and decorating the cemetery. They

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make special flower wreaths and decorate them with calaveras (skulls and skeletons). Special temporary markets called Tianguis are used to sell the necessary items for the ofrendas (offerings).

Zenpasuchitl, a type of marigold, is the traditional flower of the occasion. Altars are often covered with the bright orange petals. The dead person's favorite baked goods, candy, flowers and art are the main elements used in

celebrating Dia de los Muertos.

The altars made of ofrendas (offerings) are found in homes, businesses and public places. The altars honor the dead and preserve life. In the Mexican tradition, those who are dead provide the necessary connection between God, the Saints and the Living.

The preparation for this important celebration begins the last week of October when the great feast begins. After the October 31st, friends and relatives are visited in the cemetery.

The celebration is often called Los Dias de los Muertos because two important days are recognized. November 1, All Saints' Day, is devoted to los angelitos (little angels), and November 2, All Souls' Day, to adults.



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