**Dia de los Muertos**

A celebration in Mexico and many Latin American countries where the dead return to earth for 24-hours to be with their loved ones. Preparation includes cleaning and decorating gravesites and assembling an **Ofrenda**.

**Cleaning and decorating gravesites** stems from Spain’s Catholic tradition of All Saint’s Day and All Soul’s Day on November 1 and 2, respectively. Mass and cemetery vigils are standard practice.

**Ofrenda**

An alter that is assembled with refreshments, personal items and various other things that welcome the souls back for a day. Communities set up general alters dedicated to various people, celebrities, important historical figures or a current societal issue.

The Ofrenda is also the blending of ancient peoples’ traditions and Spain’s influence. Bread with yeast, for example, was brought to the Indian ancestors of today’s Hispanic people by Spain.

**Cempasuchil or Marigold**

*(sem-pa-SOO-cheel)*

A flower used on gravesites and Ofrendas. Its pungent odor attracts and guides the spirits to their destinations.

**Sugar Skulls**

Skulls made of sugar and decorated with icing, with a name of the honoree in the front. Sweet delights for visiting spirits.

**Calacas or Skeletons**

Usually made of paper mâché, skeletons are placed in various every-day scenarios and illustrate the idea that death should not be feared. In a way, death is even mocked.

**Pan de Muerto**

Anise-flavored bread shaped in the form of a skull (center dial) and bones (extensions). The circular shape represents the circle of life. This is the only time this bread is made.

**Fruits and Vegetables**

Represents the Element of Earth and how bountiful it is.

**Cempasuchil**

**Papel Picado or Punched Paper**

By fluttering in the wind, it represents the Element of Wind.

**Other Foods**

Making complicated foods, such as mole or tamales, shows the spirits that you are taking the time and care in preparing their favorite foods and the Ofrenda.

**Personal Items**

To make the Ofrenda more personal, small items of the loved ones are placed on the table as well.

**Glass of Water**

To quench the thirst of traveling souls. It also represents the Element of Water.

**Candles**

To light the way for the souls, one candle is placed next to each honored guest’s picture. It also represents the Element of Fire.