

CREATING AN ALTAR 101

Day of the Dead / Día de los Muertos

Although there are no rules for creating one... there are a few guidelines to create a traditional Day of the Dead altar.

There are photos on this website to show some of the past altars in our neighborhood... feel free to use your own inspiration/interpretation of them.

- Use a photo of the person being honored. You might have a cause or multiple family members honored on the same altar... if this is the case use levels to display them.
- The traditional Day of the Dead flower is the marigold or *cempasúchitl*. You can use any other plant or flowers. One of the residents of Sherman Heights creates an altar for his father, a doctor who grew up in a farm in Montana, he uses wheat instead of flowers and includes his father's medical bag on the altar, a simple, beautiful altar that is nontraditional but very special.
- Usually a display of the honored person's favorite food (i.e. candy, favorite dish, favorite drink etc)
- Usually candles are part of the altars. Since our neighborhood is comprised of wood homes, we avoid using them on our outdoor altars.
- Playing the music the departed loved one enjoyed is a special way to remember them. We have an artist who created an outdoor altar in honor of destroyed art. His mural was painted over/destroyed in 2005 and he sang while people viewed his altar.
- Traditionally sugar skulls and Day of the Dead bread is displayed (available at the SHCC and *Chicana Perk* Coffee shop -129 25th Street SD 92102).
- The use of incense or burning *copal* is used as well. In the past I have seen this sold at the Farmers Market on Imperial (again not recommended for our outdoor altars).

Enjoy creating your altar! Whatever the special meaning, if possible, please try to be at your altar to explain your inspiration on the guided tours. Remember to use heavy items to hold outdoor altars to avoid being blown over by the wind.

Share with people the love for your departed one or the cause of this special and spiritual event.

If you have any questions about what you might put on your altar, please let us know. Thank you for participating in our annual Dia de los Muertos celebration!