

# MAKING A TRADITIONAL OFRENDA

Traditional Ofrendas are dedicated to a loved one who has passed away. Contemporary Ofrendas may also be dedicated to a cause, a hero, a tragedy, victims of a natural disaster, and so on. Both are appropriate celebrations of Día de Muertos.

- **Three levels** of the altar represent heaven, earth and the underworld. (Also Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in post-Columbian times.)

- **Photos** of the person the Ofrenda is dedicated to.

The **arch** represents the passage between life and death.

- **Salt** acts to cleanse the spirit and purify their soul.

- **Calaveras/Skulls**, usually made of sugar. They represent the deceased, and also show how Mexicans are able to celebrate death. The bright colors represent vitality and personality.

- **Tamales or a family favorite food.** Familiar smells help spirits find the Ofrenda.

- **Paper/Papel Picado** represents wind, and the union between life and death, and joy. Made of tissue paper, they also represent the fragility of life

- **Pan de Muerto/Day of the Dead bread** shaped like bones, represents generosity of the host, and also the soil.

- **Bottles** of the deceased's favorite drinks, toasting our ancestors.

- **Candles** represent fire, guiding spirits to the alter and symbolizing the our love for our relatives and friends.

- **Water** quenches the deceased's thirst and gives them strength for their return journey.

- **Copal** incense in a burner. Copal resin purifies souls and spirits and elevates the prayers of friends and family.

- **Candy** is offered as a treat for the spirits, especially children.

- **Seeds** are offered as snacks for the spirits.

- **Food** represents the earth element.

- **Monarch Butterflies** migrate to Mexico each fall and are thought to be spirits of the dearly departed.

- **Flowers:** represent the fleeting nature of life. *Marigolds* guide spirits to the mortal world. *White flowers* represent the sky. *Purple flowers* represent the traditional Mexican color of mourning.

- **Cross** represents the cardinal directions and in post-Columbian times, Christianity.

- **Seeds** for plants that Monarchs love, like Milkweed.

