

Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

Día de los Muertos is an important cultural celebration in Latin America, with a particularly strong history in Mexico. It is also a meaningful custom for many Spanish-speaking communities living in the United States. Día de los Muertos is a day of remembrance. It is a time to honor, admire, and celebrate the memory of special people who died. This two-day holiday is typically filled with joy and happiness.

It is believed that during these two nights of the year the deceased may return and visit with the living. Many of the practices associated with the holiday are meant to guide the deceased back to the homes of the living and, once there, help them remember the sensations and experiences they had while they were alive. For a brief time, the living and the deceased are reunited. The holiday takes place on Nov. 1 and 2, coinciding with the Roman Catholic practices of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, respectively. In Spanish, All Saints' Day is known as the Día de Todos los Santos and All Souls' Day as Día de las Animas. Together, the two dates are combined as the Día de los Difuntos or, more commonly, as the Día de los Muertos. For those who celebrate Día de los Muertos, the first day is reserved for recognizing young children who have died while the second day is meant to honor all others. The practices associated with Día de los Muertos are complex and rooted in the intertwined histories of the ancient and modern indigenous peoples of the Americas, the conquering practices of the Spanish explorers, and modern approaches today. In short, it is a fusing of cultural practices and religions.

To celebrate and honor those who have died, families and communities create Day of the Dead Altars, known as Ofrendas, consisting of a collection of objects offered to the deceased such as brightly colored flowers like marigolds, papel picado (traditional paper banners), calaveras (sugar skulls), candles, pictures of the deceased, favorite foods, and mementos that commemorate the life of those who have died. Additionally, cemeteries are cleaned and decorated. All of this is done as a way of inviting the spirits of our special people back to visit with us for one day out of the year and celebrate their lives.

At Judi's House/JAG Institute we participate in Dia de los Muertos by providing a space for families to celebrate and create an Ofrenda de la Comunidad (Community Altar of Offerings) together. We hope that it encourages an increased cultural awareness and deeper appreciation for its historical background and modern meaning. We strive to welcome, respect, value, and support our clients, staff, board of directors, and volunteers.