

Virtual Monarch and Meadow Month Lesson: Monarch Butterflies in Mexican Traditions

In this lesson, participants will understand ways that monarch butterflies are cherished and represented in Mexican traditions.



The monarchs' return to Mexico in late fall coincides with the end of the rainy season; by this time corn is ready to be harvested. Because of this, monarchs are seen as a symbol of the fall harvest and are often referred to as the "the harvester butterfly".

Their return also coincides with the Catholic religious observance of "Day of the Dead", or "Dia de los Muertos", a multi-day long holiday that falls on the 1st and 2nd of November. In Mexico, on this day, the living believe that their departed relatives come back to Earth so they can celebrate life and death together. Death is seen as just another stage of life and is believed that lost relatives are not to be mourned but celebrated.



"Calaveras" are skulls that are used to celebrate Day of the Dead. They come in clay forms for decoration and also in an edible form as candies, called sugar skulls. Calaveras are the kids' favorite treats! The beautiful orange flowered marigolds (shown left and above) symbolizes the monarch butterfly.

The table is set in preparation for the return of their departed relatives. They usually prepare the favorite foods of the relatives they are welcoming back to Earth. Creating an altar for lost relatives is another Day of the Dead tradition. Altars include an archway, orange marigolds, food, drink, and a photo of the relative.



Joyous celebrations with beautiful decorations take place at the gravesite of these relatives. Since monarchs return to Mexico around the same time as Day of the Dead, they represent the spirits or souls of their loved ones coming back to Earth to celebrate.



Towns have parades where, in addition to festival music, marchers dress up in beautiful butterfly costumes.





Additional Resources

- [About Day of the Dead](#)
- [Monarchs and Day of the Dead](#)
- [Day of the Dead Alters](#)
- [Day of the Dead in Photos, BBC](#)
- [10 Things to Know about Day of the Dead, NatGeo](#)