



Day of the Dead is one of the most festive times of the year—a celebration when families honor their dead. This book presents a colorful look at the traditions, folk art, and fascinating history of this unique holiday.



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DAY OF THE DEAD

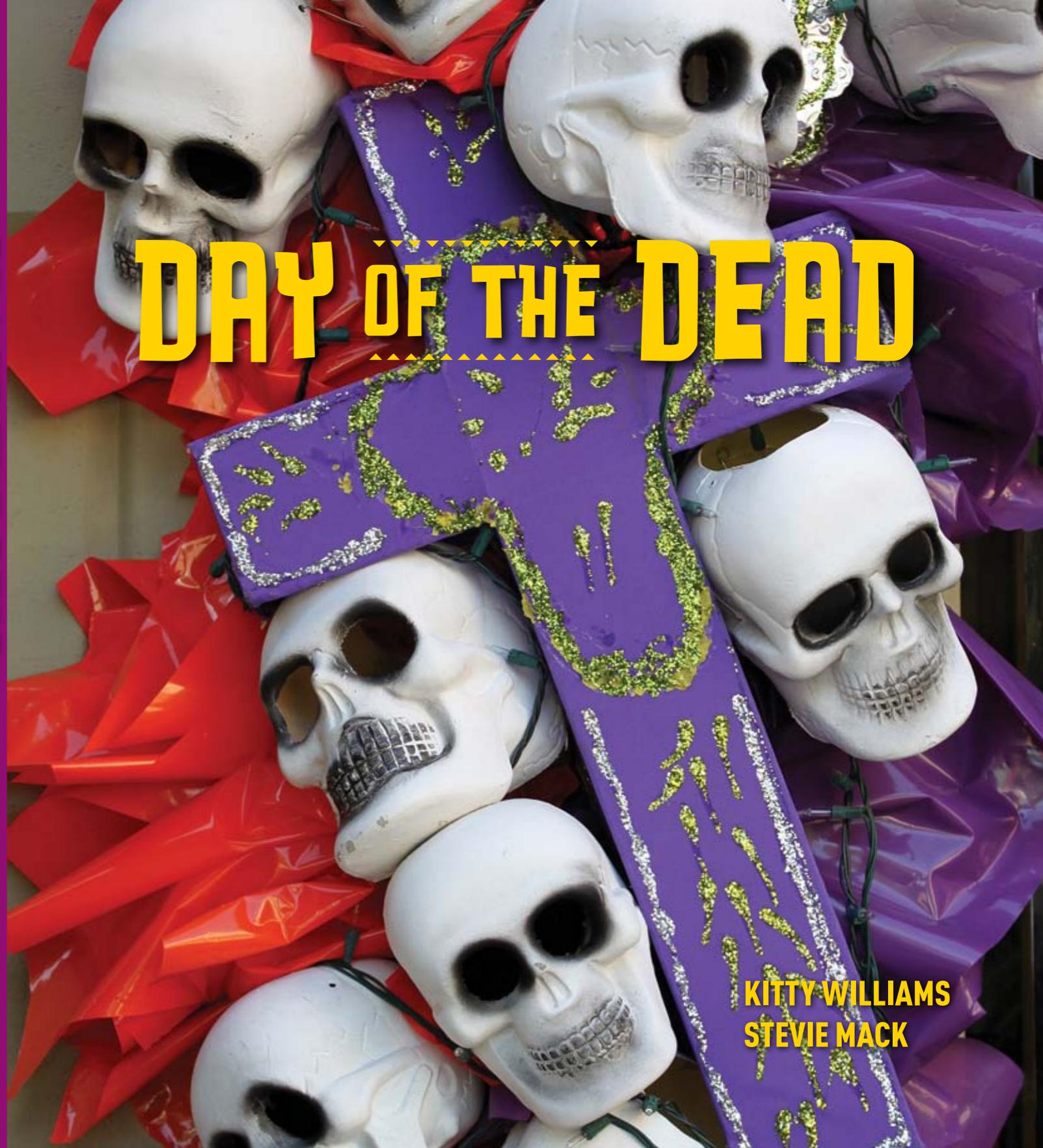
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# DAY OF THE DEAD

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# Contents

- 6**    **introduction**
- 17**   **Life From Death:** ORIGINS
- 29**   **Feasting and Revelry:** CELEBRATING WITH THE SPIRITS
- 73**   **Grinning skulls and dancing skeletons:** FOLK ART
- 119**   **RECIPES**
- 128**   **RESOURCES**





## CONTEMPORARY FOLK ART

Art plays a vital role in the celebration of the Day of the Dead. Certainly, the ofrendas and graves are decorated with a strong eye for their aesthetic appeal. But the holiday has also inspired a vibrant folk art tradition. Although there are many professional artists who create folk art for sale, much of the art is created by the people themselves, for use on their personal ofrendas or in other aspects of the festivities.

Traditionally, the majority of the folk art had an ephemeral quality. Meant to last only a short time, the materials used symbolized the fleeting nature of life itself. Thus, the care and effort with which each item was created underscored the importance of life, however impermanent it might be.





**THE BRIDAL COUPLE** is also a very popular theme.

Often presented as a gift to a newlywed couple, the skeletal bride and groom symbolize a love that will endure even after death.



GRINNING SKULLS & DANCING SKELETONS

## Dulces de Calabaza or Candied Pumpkin

This is a traditional Mexican sweet, and one that is often served for Day of the Dead. Please note that you need to use a sugar pie or other cooking pumpkin; the decorative Halloween-type pumpkins are not meant for cooking or eating.

- 1 (2 to 3 pound) whole pumpkin (to obtain 1 quart of pumpkin pieces when chopped)
  - 1 cup piloncillo, chopped or grated (optional)\*
  - 2 cinnamon sticks or 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional)
  - 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and chopped into 3 or 4 smaller pieces (optional)
  - ¼ teaspoon ground cloves (optional)
  - ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg (optional)
  - 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
  - ¼ cup sugar
1. Cut the pumpkin in half and remove the seeds and as

much stringy pulp as possible. Cut the halves in half again and remove the skin using a vegetable peeler or kitchen knife. Try to preserve as much of the flesh as possible. Cut the pumpkin into 1-inch-square chunks. Measure to make sure you have approximately 1 quart of pumpkin pieces.

2. Place the chunks of pumpkin in a fairly heavy saucepan and add water until all pieces are covered. Cover and bring to a boil for 15 minutes.
3. Add the piloncillo, cinnamon sticks or ground cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and nutmeg, if desired.\*\* Cover and boil for another 15 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the pumpkin sit in the spiced syrup for at least 8 hours or overnight.
4. In the morning, return to a boil for another 5 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to remove the chunks of pumpkin and place them on a drying rack set over waxed paper. Make sure that none of the pieces are touching each other. Let dry for at least 10 to 12 hours. If you are in a hurry, turn your oven to its lowest setting and place the pumpkin in the oven with the door ajar for 3 to 4 hours.
5. After the pumpkin has dried, mix together the 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon and sugar and roll each pumpkin piece in the mixture.

\***Note:** These hardened cones of dark sugar are widely used in Mexico and are available from vendors listed in the Resources section on page 128. Or you can substitute dark brown sugar (add 2 tablespoons of molasses for a more authentic taste).

\*\***Note:** All of these spices are optional. Some cooks prefer to make dulces de calabaza with nothing more than pumpkin and sugar.

