



Breads of the World:

Mexico – Pan de muertos

Presented 10/17/2017 by Pedro Arellano

Día de los muertos, or the Day of the Dead, Mexico's festive annual celebration of life —and death — takes place on November 2. The Day of the Dead is a time of smiles, not tears. During the day, children dress in ghost and goblin costumes and parade gaily through the streets of towns and villages. Many special candies and foods are prepared for the day, such as skulls and skeletons made from marzipan, chocolate or sugar. Bakers make sweet breads in the shape of bones, humans, flowers and animals.

Along with formal religious ceremonies, people attend more-personal rituals with their families. In honor of the dead, families create brightly decorated shrines both in their homes and at cemeteries. The shrines or altars are covered with pictures, favorite items of the deceased, flowers, candies, mescal or tequila and food, especially loaves of decorated bread.

Pan de muertos

(Makes 1 large loaf. Prep time 3-4 hours.)

Ingredients:

Dough:

- 1 scant Tablespoon or 1 (¼-ounce) package active dry yeast
- 1/4 cup warm water (about 110°F)
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- ¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons orange flower water (see note, below)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon anise seeds
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 4-4½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour

Topping:

- 1 large egg
- 1 Tablespoon granulated sugar

Directions:

1. Make the dough:

- **By hand:** In a large bowl, sprinkle yeast in the ¼ cup warm water to soften. Add heated milk (110°F) to yeast-water mixture along with the 3 beaten eggs, butter, orange flower water, salt, anise seeds, ¼ cup sugar and 2 cups of the flour. Beat vigorously for 2 minutes. Gradually add the remaining

flour ¼ cup at a time until the dough begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl. Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface. Knead, adding flour a little at a time, until the dough is smooth and elastic.

- **By mixer:** In the mixer bowl, sprinkle the yeast in the ¼ cup warm water to soften. Add heated milk (110°F) to yeast-water mixture along with the 3 beaten eggs, butter, orange flower water, salt, anise seeds, ¼ cup sugar and 2 cups of the flour. Using the paddle attachment, beat on medium-low speed for 2 minutes. Gradually add the remaining flour ¼ cup at a time until the dough begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl. Change to the dough hook. Continue to add flour 1 Tablespoon at a time until the dough just begins to clean the bowl. Knead 4 to 5 minutes on medium-low.
 - **By food processor:** In a large measuring cup or bowl, sprinkle the yeast in the ¼ cup warm water to soften. Add heated milk (110°F) to the yeast along with the 3 beaten eggs, butter and orange flower water. In a bowl, combine the salt, anise seeds, ¼ cup sugar and 4 cups flour. Put the dry ingredients in the bowl of the food processor fitted with the dough blade. Add the liquid ingredients and pulse 9 or 10 times until the ingredients begin to come together in a ball. Check the liquid-to-flour ratio. Once the dough begins to come together, process exactly 60 seconds.
 - **By bread machine:** Put the ¼ cup warm water, milk, 3 beaten eggs, butter and orange flower water in the bread pan. Add the salt, anise seeds, ¼ cup sugar and 4 cups flour to the bread pan, then sprinkle with the yeast. Select the dough cycle and press start. While the dough is mixing, check the liquid-to-flour ratio. Stop the machine after the kneading cycle. You may let the dough rise in the bread machine or a bowl.
2. **First rise:** Put the dough in an oiled bowl and turn to coat the entire ball of dough with oil. Cover with a tightly woven towel and let rise until doubled, about 1 hour.
 3. **Shape:** Turn the dough out onto a lightly oiled work surface. Remove a tennis-ball-sized portion of dough and set aside. Shape remaining piece of dough into a smooth ball and place on a parchment-lined or well-seasoned baking sheet. Flatten the large ball into a 1-inch-thick disk. Divide the remaining dough in half and roll each piece into an 8-inch rope. Lay the ropes on top of the loaf parallel about 3 inches apart or crossed. With scissors or a knife, cut into the end of each rope about ¼ inch and spread the ends apart slightly to resemble bones.
 4. **Second rise:** Cover loaf with a tightly woven towel and let rise for 45 minutes.
 5. **Preheat oven:** About 10 minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 375°F.
 6. **Prepare topping:** Beat 1 egg and 1 Tablespoon sugar until the sugar dissolves. Brush the mixture on the top and sides of the loaf.
 7. **Bake and cool:** Bake for 30 minutes or until the internal temperature of the bread reaches 190°F. Immediately remove the bread from the baking sheet and place on a rack to cool.

Notes:

- Orange flower water is available in many large supermarkets and specialty food stores. It gives a subtle orange flavor. Substitution: 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest (bread will have a bolder taste).
- This bread freezes nicely for up to 6 months. To serve, thaw the bread and reheat on a baking sheet or directly on the oven rack in a 375°F oven 7-10 minutes.

Recipe source: [Celebration Breads: Recipes, Tales, and Traditions](#) by Betsy Oppenheer