



Kitchen Cheat Sheet: Day of the Dead Bread

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Tips and Time Savers

- You can make the dough for Day of the Dead bread the day before and refrigerate overnight
- If you'd like to omit the orange glaze you can brush the bread before baking with an egg yolk mixed with 1 teaspoon of water. It gives the crust a nice glossy look.
- Fresh orange juice is best for the glaze if you've got some nice juicy oranges lying around.
- If you want a soft crust cover the bread with a clean towel and let it cool.
- The glaze and sugar will go on better if you brush 1/4 of the hot bread with glaze, sprinkle with sugar, and then move on to the next 1/4.
- You can melt orange marmalade and brush it over the finished bread for the glaze if you prefer not to make the syrup.
- Pan dulce breads are best the day they are made but they freeze well. Let cool completely, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, cover with aluminum foil and freeze for up to 3 months.
- If your delicious pan de muerto bread gets a little stale slice it and make French toast with it. Delish!

Storage

Room Temp: Store in an airtight container or tightly covered with plastic wrap for a day or two.

Freeze for longer storage.

To Freeze: wrap tightly in plastic wrap, then in aluminum foil (or plastic wrap - then a freezer container) and freeze for up to 3 months.

Reheat slices for a VERY few seconds in the microwave or wrap the loaf in aluminum foil and place in a 350F oven for 15 minutes or until warmed through.

Variations

- Shapes by region: Not every loaf is round with “bones” across the top. In some areas, bakers shape Pan de Muerto into angels, hearts, or even full human figures. (Yes, it’s as creepy-delightful as it sounds.)
- Orange blossom water: A splash gives the bread a fragrant, floral lift that feels straight out of a garden.
- Citrus swaps: Lime zest instead of orange? Totally fair game—and just as traditional in certain parts of Mexico.
- Sugared tops: Colored sugars are common—pink is the most popular, but bright yellows or greens show up too. It’s like Mardi Gras moved into your oven.
- Anise options: Whole seed, ground, or none at all. If black-licorice vibes aren’t your thing, the bread won’t be offended.
- Texture tweak: Skipping the vital wheat gluten won’t ruin the loaf—it’ll just make the inside a little denser and the crust a little softer.
- Glaze swap: Melted orange marmalade works beautifully instead of homemade syrup. Lazy shortcut? Maybe. Delicious? Definitely.
- Stuff it: Some modern bakers split the loaf and fill it with whipped cream, pastry cream, or cajeta (goat’s milk caramel).
- Sprinkle party: Sesame seeds, cinnamon sugar, or even cocoa powder sometimes make their way onto the crust.
- Regional spins: Oaxaca is known for extra-large loaves; Puebla often sprinkles sesame seeds; Michoacán loves a sugar crust tinted pink.

FAQs

What is the bread of the dead?

It’s a type of Mexican pan dulce (sweet bread) that’s traditionally baked for Día de Muertos, celebrated from November 1st to November 2nd.

How is Day of the Dead bread decorated?

Brush with the orange glaze, and/or sprinkle with sugar, powdered sugar, or brightly colored sugar.

Do I have to use anise seed?

Anise is traditional but you could use ground anise, a little anise flavoring, or leave it out completely.

Can I skip the vital wheat gluten in this recipe?

Skipping the vital wheat gluten won’t ruin the loaf—it’ll just make the inside a little denser and the crust a little softer.

What does Pan de Muerto symbolize?

The round loaf represents the cycle of life, the knob on top is the skull, and the strips of dough across the top are “bones.” Basically, it’s carbs with a side of symbolism.

Can I make Pan de Muerto without orange zest?

Yes—you can use lime zest, orange blossom water, or even leave out the citrus entirely. Just don't tell your abuela I said that.

How do you eat Pan de Muerto?

Traditionally, families serve it with coffee, hot chocolate, or atole while swapping stories about the people they're honoring. Translation: eat it warm and in big chunks.

Can you freeze Day of the Dead bread?

Yes. Wrap it tightly in plastic wrap and foil, then freeze for up to 3 months. To reheat, pop it in the oven until warmed through.

What's the best way to store Pan de Muerto?

Keep it in an airtight container at room temperature for a day or two. After that, it's French toast territory.

Nice to have

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