



SUGAR SKULLS

Sugar skulls are an important part of the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead. The festival is all about remembering the dead and celebrating their time on Earth. Their spirits are encouraged to return for a big party, and they are enticed back with offerings (*ofrendas*) of food and drink. One of the most popular offerings are sugar skulls painted in bright colours and decorated with the name of the deceased.

Before you make your sugar skull, it is important to remember that they are traditionally made as decorations for the dead, not to be eaten. Many Mexicans decorate their skulls with sequins, feathers and foil which make them inedible. When you make yours, it is much better to have fun decorating them than trying to make them edible. That much sugar won't taste very nice, anyway!

You will need:

Skulls

- 30g instant royal icing powder
- 720g granulated sugar
- 80-100ml water

Decorating Icing

- 7 tsp instant royal icing powder
- 6 tsp water
- 450g icing sugar
- Food colouring

What to do:

Making the skulls is easier if you have a skull-shaped mould; however, you can shape them by hand with a bit of patience and practice.

First, mix the sugar, royal icing powder and water together. It is important that the mix holds together when you squeeze it into a ball. Add the water a bit at a time until the consistency is right.

If you've added too much water, add a tiny bit more sugar or royal icing mix.

If you are using a mould, press the mixture into the mould and pack it in tightly. If you are modelling your skulls by hand, now is the time to do so. The mixture can dry out quite quickly, so it is important to only handle small portions at a time.

Once your skulls are made or in the mould, allow them to dry out for at least 6 hours. The longer you can leave them, the better. Once one side has dried for at least 6 hours, flip them over and let the other side dry for the same time. If they are in the mould, you will need to tip them out to let both sides dry.

Using coloured royal icing is one way to decorate sugar skulls. Mix the water with the royal icing powder and icing sugar, and beat it until it loses its shine.

Add food colouring to batches of the royal icing and use it to decorate your skull once it is fully dry. Let the skulls dry for several hours before including them in your Day of the Dead celebrations.

Remember, these skulls are meant to be decorations. Why not use your imagination and use sequins, feathers or anything else you can think of to make them stand out?

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What is the Spanish word for offerings?
2. What is often included on the sugar skull?
3. Why should you only mould small portions of the mixture at a time?
4. How long should the skulls be left to dry for before decorating?
5. If you wanted to make twice as many skulls, how much royal icing powder would you need?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What does deceased mean?

V

If something is edible, what can you do with it?

S

What kind of things could be used to decorate the skull?

I

Why shouldn't you eat the sugar skulls?

E

The author has repeated the important information about not eating the skulls, at the end of the text. Why?

Answers:

1. Ofrendas
2. Bright colours and the name of the deceased
3. It dries out quickly
4. 12 hours
5. 60g

V: Dead

V: Eat it

S: Coloured icing/sequins/feathers/foil

I: They wouldn't taste nice and they may contain things that can't be eaten

E: To remind people after they have read the instructions/made the skulls