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The Monarchs' Arrival and Mexican Traditions

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Witnessing the Arrival

Every fall for hundreds of years, people in our region have witnessed the sudden appearance of monarch butterflies. The monarchs' wondrous arrival carries special meaning, and is tied to our traditions and culture.



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Harvester Butterfly

The monarchs arrive around the first of November, just as the rainy season ends and it's time to harvest our corn. The native people of our region named the monarch the harvester butterfly.



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Ancestors Return

The monarchs arrive at the time of our traditional festivity, the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). Since pre-Hispanic times, we have believed that our dead relatives come back to visit on the night of November 1 and 2. For us, the arrival of the monarchs symbolizes our ancestors' souls returning to Earth for their annual visit.



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Remembering Loved Ones

Families set up an *ofrenda* (shrine) to honor the memory of our deceased ancestors. Lupita invited Laura Emilia and Zamara to see her family's ofrenda.



Photo © Journey North

Favorite Foods

As is our tradition, Lupita's family prepared all the dishes and drinks their grandpa used to enjoy. The colorful ofrenda is decorated with flowers, treats and mementos.



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Visiting the Cemetery

Families gather at the cemetery. Some play live music there, if the beloved relative asked for such celebration. In some parts of Mexico, people stay all night to spend special time with their ancestors.



Traditional Flowers

The bright orange *cempasúchil* (marigold) is the traditional flower of Día de los Muertos. People say the color and fragrance guide the spirits home.



Traditional Sweets

We enjoy *calaveras de azúcar* (candy skulls) and other sweet treats that are traditional at this time of year.



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Ancient Traditions

The monarchs arrive each fall as we honor our ancestors, harvest our crops, and mark the passing of another year. Following an ancient tradition of their own, the monarchs fly to this region of Mexico the way their ancestors did the year before.