



SETUP

Forget the same old, same old! Introduce your child and his or her pals to another culture by planning a Mexican-inspired birthday party.

It's an especially fun theme if your birthday's falls around Cinco de Mayo (May 5th), when Mexicans celebrate their country's independence from Spain. You can read up on Mexican traditions online or at the library to help plan your party.

The most important ingredients are: colorful decorations, tasty Mexican fare, and a piñata full of trinkets and treats. Decorating for your fête is easy: Just think bright colors, cacti and chili peppers when it comes to the motif for your paper plates, cups, and napkins.

Weather permitting, plan your fiesta for outdoors where kids have plenty of room to dance and play.

PARTY START

The Big Hello

Welcome your young guests with a heartfelt "Hola!" (Hello) or "Buenos dias!" (Good day) as they arrive. Get them in the mood for a fiesta by outfitting each child with a sombrero to wear at the party and take home as a party favor at the end of the day.

ACTIVITIES

Piñata

What's a Mexican fiesta without a piñata? Nada! A piñata can be the main event at your party. Piñatas are available in all different shapes and sizes – from a sombrero or cactus to your child's favorite characters like Dora the Explorer™, Clifford the Big Red Dog™, and Barbie™. Some piñatas come filled with candy and trinkets; others will need to be filled by you before the festivities start.



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Piñata is best played with outside where there's plenty of room, and an adult should always supervise. Before the party starts, hang the piñata from a sturdy tree branch. When it's time to crack it open, have kids form a line to take their turn. The child whose turn it is can be blindfolded, given a plastic bat, and led to the spot from which he or she will hit the piñata.

Give each child three hits before removing the blindfold and having him or her pass the bat to the next child. Children who've already taken their turn or who are waiting for their chance should stand at a safe distance from the piñata.

If the idea of kids swinging a plastic bat makes you nervous, you can opt for a pull-apart piñata. How it works: There are rows of strings hanging from the bottom of the piñata – and one is rigged to open the piñata. Each child takes a turn pulling a string, and one child's tug will split it open.

Cap Your Fiesta with a Hat Dance

Need other activity ideas? Try putting on some Latin music and letting your guests dance. Hand out maracas and let them dance freestyle and shake their maracas. Young children will get a kick out of this noisy fun! A great – and easy – group dance you can try is the Mexican Hat Dance.

Simply place a large sombrero on the ground, crank up the music (toy and party stores often sell tapes or CDs of the music to the Mexican Hat Dance) and let the kids circle around the hat while they clap to the beat. Olé!

PARTY END

The Big Finale

What to do at the end of the party when all the kids are waiting to be picked up:

- Watch a video.
- Take out the activity books for the kids to use.
- Have the birthday child thank each guest as they depart.

Remember to send thank you notes to all guests who attended.

FOOD IDEAS

Make-Your-Own Fiesta Food

A south of the border feast is sure to please a crowd of hungry kids since there are many Mexican options that are favorites of children. Start with chips and salsa or



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guacamole. For heartier fare, also serve chili – consider making chili con carne (with meat) as well as a vegetarian version for non-meat eaters – and a fresh salad with plenty of colorful veggies like cucumbers, shaved carrots and green and red peppers.

Finally, lay out the fixings for a make-your-own taco station and let your guests customize their lunch to their liking. You will need:

- Taco shells
- Cooked and seasoned ground beef (look for Mexican seasoning packets at the grocery store)
- Shredded cheese like cheddar or Monterey Jack
- Shredded lettuce
- Sour cream
- Guacamole

For dessert, serve a platter of sliced fresh fruit and a birthday cake. Need inspiration for your cake? Consider using a cactus-shaped pan and green icing – or turning a regular rectangular cake into a Mexican flag by icing the left third of the cake in green, the center section in white and the right third in red icing.



For more great birthday party planning tips and advice online, visit www.birthdaysrus.com. For the best party supplies and gifts go to www.toysrus.com, or shop at a Toys"R"Us store near you.

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