

# Create a Comforting Casserole

You don't have to be a fancy chef to build a better dish. Take what you have on hand and make a comforting casserole!

Searcy, Ark. –

So you're not a TV chef and don't have time to create some Euro-Asian-American fusion dish with Napa cabbage. However, by stocking the pantry with the right stuff, making a tasty, economical meal is as simple as choosing ingredients from columns.

A comforting casserole may be just the thing to use up various leftovers. No use throwing away money when you can make something tasty out of it! My dad did this once. He just threw a whole bunch of stuff together, and Voila! A tasty casserole! My mom kept asking, "Don't we need a vegetable?" Dad said, "Nope! It's in there!" "What about some rolls?" asked Mom. "Nope! It's all in there!" was Dad's response.



You don't have to be an expert cook or even have a large pantry. Just a few items and knowledge about what your family likes! Make it fit your family.

## What should I keep in my pantry for quick casseroles?

Here are some recommendations for keeping in the pantry for an anytime skillet meal or casserole. Each one-dish casserole contains one food from each of the groups below:

### Starch:

- 2 cups uncooked pasta (regular or whole grain macaroni, penne, spiral, bow tie, etc.), cooked
- 1 cup uncooked long-grain white or brown rice, cooked
- 4 cups uncooked noodles, cooked

### Protein:

- 2 cups cooked ground beef (about 1 pound, cooked & drained)
- 2 cups cooked & diced chicken, turkey, ham, beef, or pork
- 2 cups chopped hard-cooked egg
- 2 cans (6 to 8 oz. each) fish or seafood, flaked
- 2 cups cooked or canned dry beans (kidney, pinto, etc. – about 1 can drained)

### Vegetables:

- 1 (10 oz.) package thawed and drained frozen spinach, broccoli, green beans, green peas, etc.
- 1 (16 oz.) can green beans, peas, carrots, corn, drained
- 2 cups sliced fresh zucchini
- 2 cups cooked vegetables of your choice (use up those small containers of leftovers)

### Sauce (choose one):

- 1 can soup plus 1 can milk (Cream of potato plus milk, cream of chicken plus milk, cream of celery plus milk, cream of mushroom plus milk)
- OR 1 cup cheese plus 2 cups milk
- OR tomato soup plus 1 can water; onion soup plus 1 can water.

- 1 (16 oz.) can diced tomatoes with juice
- 2 cups white sauce ([recipe below](#))

### Flavor:

- ½ cup chopped celery, ¼ cup chopped onion, ¼ cup sliced black olives
- ½ teaspoons mixed dried leaf herbs (basil, thyme, marjoram, tarragon, etc.)
- Salt & pepper to taste
- For Mexican flavor, use cumin, oregano, chili powder, cilantro, and garlic
- For Italian flavor, use basil, oregano, parsley, and garlic
- For Asian flavor, use soy sauce, ginger, garlic, chilies, and turmeric
- For a savory/Thanksgiving flavor, use rosemary, sage, thyme, and parsley

### Toppings (optional, add after heating and place on top):

- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup shredded Swiss, Cheddar, Monterey Jack or other cheese
- ¼ cup buttered bread crumbs
- ¼ to ½ cup canned fried onion rings
- About 2 tablespoons crushed chips or crackers

Select food(s) from each category or use your own favorites. Combine in a 2-2 ½ quart casserole dish that has been greased or sprayed with cooking spray. Cover and bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for about 50-60 minutes (adding topping about 10 minutes before being done). You can also microwave using 50% power for about 15 to 30 minutes, rotating or stirring as necessary. Heat until steaming hot (165 degrees F) throughout. Makes about 6 servings.

### Tips to Remember

- Be sure to refrigerate leftovers straight away. Throwing away food is like throwing away money.
- Use leftovers within three days or freeze them.
- Thaw frozen leftovers in the refrigerator.
- Plan one meal a week to use leftovers. It's almost like getting a free meal!

### White Sauce Recipe

Don't be intimidated by making this sauce. It's pretty easy and can be done in the microwave also. You probably have all the ingredients!

#### Ingredients

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#### Directions

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- 1 ½ tablespoons margarine or butter
- 3 tablespoon flour
- 1 ½ cups milk
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- Dash of pepper

### Stove Top Instructions

1. Melt margarine or butter in a saucepan on the stove.
2. Mix in flour to make a smooth paste.
3. Slowly add milk.
4. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly until thick.
5. Add salt and pepper.
6. Cook 3 minutes longer.

### Microwave Instructions

1. Melt butter in microwave.
2. Add flour to make a paste.
3. Slowly add milk.
4. Cook 1 minute, then stir.
5. Cook & stir every minute until thickened.
6. Add salt & pepper.
7. Cook another minute or so.

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For more information about meal planning or nutrition or for a handout on Create-A-Casserole, contact our office at the University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service in White County, at 2400 Old Searcy Landing Road, Searcy AR. The University of Arkansas System, Division of Agriculture is an equal opportunity/equal access/affirmative action institution. You can also call 501-268-5394 or e-mail me at [kcullum@uada.edu](mailto:kcullum@uada.edu) and be sure to follow Katie on Facebook @ uaex white county fcs .

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