

ALI'S KITCHEN

Heap on the Hash Brown Taco Casserole

The humble casserole doesn't always get the love that it deserves

Column and photos by Ali Carter, Wisconsin Potato Growers Auxiliary

In our home hangs a framed letter gifted to me on Mother's Day by my then eight-year-old daughter.

The letter is filled with the reasons I am loved, sprinkled with a few sweetly misspelled words, and scrawled in her precious little-girl handwriting. I treasure this letter.

And one line particularly brings a smile each time I read it: "I love my mom because she makes the BEST casseroles!"

Back then, we ate a lot of casseroles. A *lot* of casseroles. I made it my mission to stretch our food budget as far as possible while feeding our family of six.



This meant some creative cooking and yesterday's leftovers often became today's casserole. Not exactly elegant dinner fare, but we always ate well, enjoyed mealtimes together and made some memories with a few of the inspired combinations attempted over the years.

COMFORT FOOD

The humble casserole (or "hotdish" if you're our neighbor one state over) doesn't always get the love that it deserves. But what's not to love about a meal that's both baked and served in the same dish (less dirty dishes to scrub) and filled with delicious and comforting ingredients?

Three of our four children have now moved out of the house to begin their own next chapters, so I typically have less people to feed throughout the week. Yet, being a unique way of combining flavors and textures, we still enjoy the occasional casserole.

*I used eight individual ramakins for this recipe, but a typical casserole dish will be perfect as well.

**If using one large baking vessel, allow the casserole to cook in the oven a bit longer than I mention in this recipe to ensure that everything is nicely warmed through.

continued on pg. 70



Ingredients:

Hash Browns Taco Casserole

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 bell pepper (diced)
- 1 medium yellow onion (diced)
- 1/2 cup corn
- 1 (15 oz.) can black beans (drained)
- 1 (15 oz.) can tomato sauce
- 3 tbsp. taco seasoning
- 4 oz. cream cheese
- 3 cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided
- 1 (20 oz.) bag frozen hash brown potatoes, thawed
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. cumin
- Chopped green onion



Add the corn, black beans, tomato sauce, taco seasoning, cream cheese and 1 cup of the shredded cheese to the skillet and stir together to combine the ingredients.

Divide the beef mixture equally among the prepared ramekins (or spread in an even layer in the bottom of the prepared casserole dish).

In a separate bowl, combine the defrosted hash browns, salt, pepper, cumin and remaining 2 cups of shredded cheese.

Stir well to combine and then top the beef with the potato mixture.

Place in the preheated oven and bake 20-30 minutes, or until the cheese is melty and the tops of the hash browns begin to brown and become a bit crispy.

Remove from oven and top with chopped green onions.

Enjoy! **BC^T**

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DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Lightly grease ramekins (or a 2-quart casserole dish) and set aside.

Brown the ground beef over medium-high heat in a large skillet. Add the bell peppers and onion and continue to cook for another 5 to 10 minutes, until veggies are softened.

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 Heartland AG Systems 14, 63
 Jay-Mar, Inc..... 46
 John Miller Farms 2
 J.W. Mattek 29
 Lockwood Mfg. 41
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 Nelson's Vegetable Storage
 Systems Inc. 70
 Nolan Sales LLC..... 50
 North Central Irrigation 51
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 Nutrien Ag Solutions Great Lakes..... 31
 Oasis Irrigation 72
 Omex USA..... 26
 Oro Agri 3
 Potatoes USA 11, 13
 R&H Machine, Inc..... 10
 Riesterer & Schnell 32
 Roberts Irrigation 47
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 Rural Mutual Insurance 52
 Sand County Equipment..... 65
 Schroeder Brothers Farms..... 7
 Swiderski Equipment..... 35
 ThorPack..... 67
 T.I.P. 5
 United Potato Growers of Wisconsin.. 17
 Vantage North Central..... 43
 Vive Crop Protection..... 40
 Volm Companies..... 19
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