**Flexible Casseroles**

*Fills one 9 x 13” casserole dish, to feed a family.*

What to make for dinner when you’re faced with a “mish-mash” of leftovers, garden produce, unfamiliar ingredients? Make a casserole! Cooks in the past titled these dishes “surprise” or “a la king” meals. They are fun to create, because they are so open to interpretation. Don’t be shy with spices. A salad with fruit would round out your meal.

**Ingredients**

* **Protein:** 1 to 1½ pounds cooked or canned meat, or 1-2 15 oz. cans cooked beans
* **Starch\*** 1 pound of cooked pasta, or any of the following: 2 cups cooked rice or grains, one bag frozen hash browns/tater tots, 4-5 medium potatoes sliced or mashed, one large head of cauliflower chopped or cooked and mashed
* **Vegetables:** 1 bag frozen vegetables, or 1-2 15 oz. cans vegetables, or one head broccoli chopped, or 2-4 cups fresh or leftover cooked vegetables, plus 1 large onion and 4 cloves garlic chopped and sautéed *(this should work even with raw carrots or potatoes, just fork-test them until they are tender)*
* **Sauce:** 3 cups of sauce: use one can of cream soup, or make your own white sauce, or use marinara, alfredo, gravy, enchilada sauce, pesto and/or stock
* **Cheese:** 1-2 cups shredded cheese – ½ cup goes into the mixture, the rest on top
* **Herbs/Spices:** additions to taste
* **Toppings:** French-fried onions, crumbled corn flakes, breadcrumbs, or chopped nuts

**Directions**

Preheat oven to 350° F

Prepare and assemble your ingredients. Mix them together with ½ cup of the cheese, and pile into your casserole dish. Bake, covered if you are using pasta, otherwise – bake uncovered, for 30 minutes total, but check at 20 minutes!

At 20 minute mark: remove cover if you’ve used it for pasta, add cheese, other toppings. Return to oven for final 10 minutes.

**\*Starches** are a type of food made up of carbohydrates. **Carbohydrates** are little packages of sugar. **Sugar** gives us energy! Some sugar makes us feel tired because our bodies absorb it too quickly. Starch is different than those sugars, because the chain of carbohydrates in starches helps give our bodies energy that lasts a long time. Whole grains, like brown rice, whole-wheat spaghetti and oatmeal are all examples of starchy foods that give us long-lasting energy. Vegetables like potatoes, corn and beans are examples of starchy foods too. You and your family can use whatever type of starchy food you like in this recipe. They will not only help you feel full but also give your body and brain the energy it needs!

Variations on the Flexible Casserole:

**Tamale Pie**

Protein: ground beef, chicken, or turkey, pinto or black beans

Starch: Mexican-flavored rice, cornbread

Vegetables: roasted peppers, corn, olives, chiles, plus onion and garlic

Sauce: enchilada sauce, tomato sauce, mild salsa

Cheese: cheddar, jack, or Mexican blend

Spices: taco flavorings, especially chili powder, cumin, paprika

Toppings: french fried onions, pepitas – after baking, try cilantro, avocado, sour cream

**Seafood Casserole**

Protein: canned or poached tuna or other seafood

Starch: pasta

Vegetables: peas, celery, mushrooms, plus onion and garlic

Sauce: white sauce, cheese sauce, cream soup – mushroom or celery

Cheese: jack

Spices: celery seed, mustard

Toppings: bread crumbs, french fried onions, crushed potato chips

**Thanksgiving in a Dish**

Protein: turkey or chicken

Starch: dressing, mashed potatoes, yams

Vegetables: green beans, pumpkin, plus onion and garlic

Sauce: turkey gravy, cream of mushroom soup

Cheese: mozzarella

Spices: sage, oregano

Toppings: french fried onions – after baking, serve with cranberry sauce

**Chicken a la King**

Protein: chicken

Starch: rice or noodles

Vegetables: swiss chard, leeks, peas, mushrooms, celery, plus onion and garlic

Sauce: white sauce, gravy, cream soup – mushroom, chicken, or celery

Cheese: jack

Spices: tarragon

Toppings: panko

**Asian Flavors**

Protein: chicken, shrimp, beef, pork, or chickpeas

Starch: rice or ramen noodles

Vegetables: bok choy, water chestnuts, peppers, snow peas, carrots, plus onion and garlic

Sauce: hoisin thinned with stock or fish sauce

Cheese: jack

Spices: Chinese 5 spices, soy sauce

Toppings: panko