

## King Ranch Casserole - Simple •

*Shredded rotisserie chicken is combined with a spiced sauce of caramelized corn, sautéed vegetables, cream soups, and Ro-Tel. The mixture is layered with quartered corn tortillas and sharp cheddar cheese, then baked until bubbly and golden.*

### Ingredients

Rotisserie chicken . . . . .	1 (about 3 lbs.)	MSG . . . . .	1/2 tsp.
Cream of mushroom soup . . .	10 oz. can	Mexican spice mix . . . . .	2 Tbsp.
Cream of chicken soup . . . . .	10 oz. can	Lard (or bacon fat) . . . . .	2 Tbsp. + 1 tsp.
Sweet corn, canned . . . . .	10 oz. can	Onion . . . . .	1 large
Black beans, canned . . . . .	15 oz. can	Bell pepper . . . . .	1
Garlic cloves . . . . .	4-6	Ro-Tel . . . . .	10-14 oz. can
Onion powder . . . . .	1 tsp.	Corn tortillas, medium . . . . .	16
		Sharp cheddar cheese . . . . .	16 oz.

### Directions

Preheat oven to  $375^{\circ}\text{F}$  — Drain and rinse **black beans**; set aside in *Medium Bowl #2* — Drain **sweet corn**; set aside in *Medium Bowl #1* — Combine **Mexican spice mix** and **MSG** in *Small Bowl #1* (spice blend) — Shred **cheese**; set aside in *Large Bowl #3* — Quarter 16 **corn tortillas**; set aside on a plate — Dice **onion** and **bell pepper**; mince **garlic**; combine in *Medium Bowl #3* (aromatics) — Shred **rotisserie chicken** into *Large Bowl #1*, discarding skin and bones — Grease a 3 quart baking dish with 1 tsp. **lard**

1. In a large skillet, melt 2 Tbsp. **lard** over medium heat. Add **sweet corn** (*Medium Bowl #1*) and sauté until well browned, about *4-5 minutes*. Corn is done when kernels appear golden brown with darker spots, smell sweet and nutty, and have a slightly crisp texture when tasted.
2. Add **onion**, **bell pepper**, and **garlic** (*Medium Bowl #3*). Sauté over medium heat for *8 minutes* until vegetables are softened and translucent: onion should appear clear and glossy, bell pepper should be tender, and garlic should be fragrant without browning. Raise heat to *high* and cook undisturbed for *1 minute*, then stir and cook *1 minute* more until vegetables have dark caramelized spots on edges and smell sweet and nutty.

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3. Reduce heat to *medium-low*. Add undrained **cream of mushroom soup**, undrained **cream of chicken soup**, undrained **Ro-Tel**, and **spice blend** (*Small Bowl #1*). Stir to combine.
4. Bring to a simmer, stirring occasionally, and cook for *3 minutes* until well combined and heated through. Sauce is done when it appears uniform in color, bubbles gently throughout, and feels hot when a small amount is tested on the back of a spoon.
5. Pour **vegetable and sauce mixture** from the skillet over the **shredded chicken** (*Large Bowl #1*) and stir to coat evenly.
6. Layer ingredients in the prepared baking dish:
  - First layer:  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the **tortilla quarters**,  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the **chicken mixture**,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the **shredded cheese** (*Large Bowl #3*)
  - Second layer:  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the **tortilla quarters**, remaining **chicken mixture**,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the **shredded cheese** (*Large Bowl #3*)
  - Final layer: remaining **tortilla quarters**, remaining **shredded cheese** (*Large Bowl #3*)
7. Bake uncovered at  $375^{\circ}F$  for *30-35 minutes* until bubbly and cheese is melted. Casserole is done when edges are bubbly and beginning to brown, cheese is fully melted and golden brown on top, and center is hot throughout (internal temperature should reach  $165^{\circ}F$  if checked). Continue baking in *3 minute* increments if center is not hot or cheese is not golden.
8. Let stand for *10 minutes* before serving.

## Equipment Required

- 3 quart baking dish
- Large skillet (12-inch preferred)
- Large prep bowls (2)
- Medium prep bowls (3)
- Small prep bowl (1)
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Mixing spoon or spatula
- Instant-read thermometer (optional but recommended)
- Cutting board and chef's knife

## Yield

- Serves 6-8 as main dish
- Makes one 3 quart casserole

## Mise en Place

- *Large Bowl #1* — shredded **rotisserie chicken** (about 3 lbs., discarding skin and bones; about 4-5 cups shredded)
- *Large Bowl #3* — shredded **sharp cheddar cheese** (16 oz., about 4 cups)
- *Medium Bowl #1* — drained **sweet corn** (10 oz. can, about 1 1/4 cups)
- *Medium Bowl #2* — drained and rinsed **black beans** (15 oz. can, about 1 1/2 cups; note: not used in this simple version)
- *Medium Bowl #3* — aromatics: diced **onion** (1 large, about 1 1/2 cups), diced **bell pepper** (1 pepper, about 3/4 cup), minced **garlic** (4-6 cloves)
- *Small Bowl #1* — spice blend: 2 Tbsp. **Mexican spice mix**, 1/2 tsp. **MSG**
- 16 quartered **corn tortillas** set aside on a plate
- Prep sequence: drain and rinse beans, drain corn, combine spices, shred cheese, quarter tortillas, dice aromatics, shred chicken, grease baking dish

## Ingredient Tips

- Use a quality **rotisserie chicken** for best flavor; remove all skin and bones carefully
- **Corn tortillas** should be fresh and pliable; stale tortillas may become too brittle when quartered

- **Sharp cheddar cheese** provides the best flavor; pre-shredded works but freshly shredded melts more evenly
- **Mexican spice mix** can be store-bought or homemade; adjust quantity to taste preference
- **Ro-Tel** adds heat and acidity; use mild or original depending on heat preference
- **Lard** or **bacon fat** adds authentic flavor; butter can be substituted if needed

## Preparation Tips

- Caramelizing **corn** properly is key—take time to develop golden brown color and nutty aroma
- Don't rush the vegetable sauté—allowing vegetables to soften before high-heat caramelization prevents burning
- The high-heat finish on vegetables creates dark caramelized spots that add depth of flavor
- Stir **sauce** mixture well to fully incorporate cream soups and Ro-Tel
- Layer **tortillas** evenly to ensure even distribution throughout the casserole
- Don't overbake—cheese should be golden and bubbly, not browned or crispy
- Letting casserole stand before serving allows it to set slightly for cleaner slices
- If casserole appears too dry, the sauce may need more liquid; if too wet, bake longer

## Make Ahead & Storage

- Shred **chicken** up to 2 days ahead; store covered in refrigerator
- Prepare **vegetables** (corn, onion, bell pepper, garlic) up to 1 day ahead; store covered in refrigerator
- Make **sauce mixture** up to 1 day ahead; store covered in refrigerator
- Assemble entire casserole up to 1 day ahead; cover and refrigerate, then add 5 minutes to bake time
- Leftovers keep 3-4 days refrigerated, covered tightly
- Reheat individual portions in microwave or reheat entire casserole at 350°F for 20-25 minutes until hot throughout
- Freezes well for up to 3 months; thaw in refrigerator overnight before reheating

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### **Serving Suggestions**

- Serve hot from the oven while cheese is still bubbly
- Excellent as a complete meal with a simple green salad
- Pairs well with Mexican rice or refried beans
- Garnish with fresh cilantro, diced tomatoes, or sliced jalapeños if desired
- Serve with sour cream or guacamole on the side
- Leftovers make excellent packed lunches; re-heat thoroughly