

# Chicken Broccoli Rice Casserole •

*Pressure-cooked chicken thighs are diced and combined with al-dente rice, blanched broccoli, and sautéed vegetables (caramelized corn, onion, garlic, and mushrooms). A spiced roux-based cream sauce binds everything together, and the casserole is baked until bubbly and topped with crispy fried onions for texture.*

## Ingredients

Chicken thighs	2-3lb.	Sweet corn, canned	8 oz.
Rice, long-grain white	2 cups	Bay leaf	2
Neutral oil	2 tsp.	Thyme, dried	1 tsp.
Water	4 cups	Rosemary, dried	1 tsp.
Chicken Better Than Bouillon	3 Tbsp.	Sweet paprika	1 tsp.
Broccoli	1 head	MSG	¼ tsp.
Cream cheese	8 oz.	Garlic powder	½ tsp.
Onion, medium	1	Onion powder	½ tsp.
Garlic cloves	6-8	Nutmeg powder	pinch
Butter	6 ½ Tbsp.	Salt	1 tsp.
Flour	3 Tbsp.	Black pepper	½ tsp.
Milk	2 cups	Red pepper, crushed	¼ tsp.
Mushroom slices, canned	8 oz.	Crispy fried onions	¼ cup

## Directions

Preheat oven to  $375^{\circ}\text{F}$  — Prepare **chicken broth**: whisk 3 Tbsp. **Better Than Bouillon** into 4 cups **water** until dissolved; set aside in *Medium Bowl #1* (broth) — Chop **broccoli**; set aside in *Medium Bowl #2* — Drain **corn**, dice **onion**, mince **garlic**, and drain **mushrooms**; combine in *Medium Bowl #3* (vegetables for step 5) — Soften **cream cheese** at room temp and cube; set aside in *Medium Bowl #4* (cream cheese) — Grease a 9 inch × 13 inch baking dish with ½ Tbsp. **butter**

1. Start cooking **rice** al-dente using 2 cups **chicken broth** (*Medium Bowl #1*) and a **bay leaf**. Rice is done when grains are tender but still have a slight bite in the center (not fully soft), and most liquid has been absorbed but rice appears slightly wet. Stop your rice cooker *5-10 minutes* early, or check rice manually: grains should be separate, not mushy, and have a firm center when bitten. While rice cooks, proceed with steps 4 and 5.
2. Place **chicken thighs** in Instant Pot. Add 2 cups **chicken broth** (*Medium Bowl #1*), 1 tsp. **thyme**, and one **bay leaf**. Cook on **high pressure** for *15 minutes*, then allow natural release for *5 minutes* before manually releasing remaining pressure. Chicken is done when meat is tender and easily pulls away from bones, and internal temperature reaches  $165^{\circ}\text{F}$  on an instant-read thermometer.

3. Set cooked **chicken** aside on a plate; let rest for *5-10 minutes* until cool enough to handle (meat should feel warm but not hot to the touch). Pick and dice meat, discarding bones and skin. Place diced **chicken** in *Large Bowl #1* (final mixture). Strain cooked broth through a fine-mesh strainer and reserve in *Medium Bowl #5* (reserved broth); you should have approximately 2 cups of reserved broth.
4. While rice and chicken cooks, bring a pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Blanch **broccoli** (*Medium Bowl #2*) for *2 minutes* until bright green and crisp-tender: florets should appear vibrant green (not dull or olive-colored), stems should feel slightly softened when pierced with a knife but still have resistance, and broccoli should maintain its structure without becoming mushy. Immediately strain in a metal colander, rinsing with cold water to stop cooking. Drain well and transfer to *Large Bowl #1* (final mixture).
5. While rice continues cooking, prepare vegetables. In a large skillet, melt 4 Tbsp. **butter** on medium heat. Add 2 tsp. **oil** and **corn** from *Medium Bowl #3* and increase heat to medium-high to brown and caramelize the corn, about *5 minutes* until kernels appear golden brown with some darker spots and smell sweet and nutty. Add diced **onion** from *Medium Bowl #3* and cook until translucent and softened, *5-10 minutes*; onion should appear clear and glossy, edges should be slightly golden, and pieces should feel soft when pressed with a spatula. Add **garlic** and **mushrooms** from *Medium Bowl #3*, cooking for another *5 minutes* until garlic is fragrant (aromatic but not browned) and mushrooms are tender and have released their liquid. Remove from heat and transfer to *Large Bowl #1* (final mixture).
6. In a large saucepan, melt 2 Tbsp. **butter** over medium heat until foaming subsides. Add 1 tsp. **rosemary**, 1 tsp. **paprika**,  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. **MSG**,  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. **garlic powder**,  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. **onion powder**, pinch **nutmeg**, 1 tsp. **salt**,  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. **black pepper**, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. **red pepper**. Heat on medium, stirring constantly for *30 seconds* until spices are fragrant and evenly distributed. Sprinkle 3 Tbsp. **flour** over the butter/spice mixture using a whisk to combine until no dry flour remains. Cook, stirring constantly for *2 minutes* until roux appears light golden brown (blond roux), smells nutty, and has a smooth, paste-like consistency with no raw flour taste. If roux begins to darken too quickly or smell burnt, reduce heat immediately. If lumps form, continue whisking vigorously until smooth.
7. Gradually whisk in 2 cups of **reserved broth** (*Medium Bowl #5*), then 2 cups **milk**, adding liquid in a steady stream while whisking constantly to prevent lumps. Heat and whisk constantly until sauce reaches a gentle boil and thickens noticeably, about *5-8 minutes*. Sauce is done when it coats the back of a spoon thickly (a line drawn through it with your finger should hold clearly), appears smooth and creamy (not thin or watery), and bubbles gently throughout. If sauce doesn't thicken after *8 minutes*, continue cooking and whisking; it may need an additional *2-3 minutes*. If lumps form, strain sauce through a fine-mesh strainer before proceeding. Add cubes of **cream cheese** (*Medium Bowl #4*) and whisk until melted and smooth with no visible chunks remaining. If cream cheese doesn't melt smoothly, remove from heat and continue whisking off heat until smooth. Remove from heat and transfer to *Large Bowl #1* (final mixture).
8. Add cooked **rice** to *Large Bowl #1* (final mixture) and mix all components until all ingredients are evenly distributed and coated with sauce. Mixture should appear uniform with no dry spots.
9. Transfer mixture to prepared baking dish, spreading evenly. Bake at  $375^{\circ}\text{F}$  for *20 minutes* until edges are bubbly and beginning to brown, and center is hot throughout. Remove from oven to sprinkle liberally with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup **crispy fried onions**, and bake another *10 minutes* until top is golden brown, edges are bubbly and slightly crisp, and casserole is hot throughout (internal temperature should reach  $165^{\circ}\text{F}$  if checked). Continue baking in *3 minute* increments if center is not hot or top is not golden. Rest *5-10 minutes* before serving to allow casserole to set slightly.

## Equipment Required

- Instant Pot or pressure cooker
- Rice cooker (or stovetop method)
- 9 inch × 13 inch baking dish
- Large saucepan (for roux and sauce)
- Large skillet (12-inch preferred)
- Large pot (for blanching broccoli)
- Metal colander
- Fine-mesh strainer
- Large prep bowl (1)
- Medium prep bowls (5)
- Instant-read thermometer
- Whisk
- Slotted spoon
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Cutting board and chef's knife

## Yield

- Serves 6-8 as main dish
- Makes one 9 inch × 13 inch casserole

## Mise en Place

- *Large Bowl #1* — final **mixture**: accumulates finished components as they're completed (diced **chicken** from step 2, blanched **broccoli** from step 4, cooked **vegetables** from step 5, **sauce** from step 7, cooked **rice** added in step 8; about 12-14 cups total when complete)
- *Medium Bowl #1* — **chicken broth**: 4 cups **water** with 3 Tbsp. **Better Than Bouillon** (about 4 cups total, used in steps 1 and 3)
- *Medium Bowl #2* — chopped **broccoli** (whole head, about 3-4 cups, blanched in step 4 then transferred to Large Bowl)
- *Medium Bowl #3* — vegetables for step 5: drained **corn** (8 oz., about 1 cup), diced **onion** (1 medium, about 1 cup), minced **garlic** (6-8 cloves), and drained **mushrooms** (8 oz., about ½ cup) — combined in prep, added sequentially to skillet in step 5, then transferred to Large Bowl
- *Medium Bowl #4* — cubed **cream cheese** (8 oz., softened at room temperature, about 1 cup, used in step 7)
- *Medium Bowl #5* — reserved **chicken broth** (created in step 2, about 2 cups, used in step 7)
- Soften **cream cheese** at room temperature *30 minutes* before cooking
- Prep sequence: broth first, then vegetables (broccoli, corn, onion, garlic/mushrooms), then cream cheese

## Ingredient Tips

- Use bone-in, skin-on **chicken thighs** for best flavor; the bones and skin contribute to the rich broth
- **Long-grain white rice** works best; avoid short-grain or sticky rice varieties
- Fresh **broccoli** with tight florets and firm stems is ideal; avoid yellowing or limp broccoli
- Canned **mushrooms** are convenient, but fresh sliced mushrooms can be substituted (sauté until tender before adding to vegetables)
- Quality **Better Than Bouillon** provides depth; adjust amount to taste preference
- Full-fat **cream cheese** provides best texture and flavor
- **Crispy fried onions** add essential texture; don't skip or substitute

## Preparation Tips

- Pressure cooking **chicken** produces tender meat and flavorful broth; don't skip the natural release period
- Reserve the cooked **chicken broth** carefully—it's essential for the sauce and should yield approximately 2 cups
- Cook **rice** al-dente (slightly undercooked) as it will finish in the oven; fully cooked rice will become mushy
- Blanching **broccoli** maintains bright color and crisp-tender texture; don't overcook or it will become mushy in the final bake
- Caramelizing **corn** brings out natural sweetness; take time to develop golden brown color
- Building the **roux** slowly prevents burning; watch for light golden color and nutty aroma
- Whisk **sauce** constantly while adding liquid to prevent lumps; if lumps form, strain before proceeding
- **Cream cheese** should be at room temperature and cubed small for easy melting
- Combine all components while warm for easier mixing and even distribution
- Add **crispy fried onions** near the end to preserve their crunch; they'll burn if added too early
- Rest casserole before serving to allow sauce to set slightly for cleaner slices

## Make Ahead & Storage

- Prep **chicken** and **broth** up to *2 days* ahead; store separately in refrigerator
- Cook **rice** up to *1 day* ahead; store covered in refrigerator
- Blanch **broccoli** up to *1 day* ahead; store covered in refrigerator
- Prepare **vegetables** (corn, onion, garlic, mushrooms) up to *1 day* ahead; store covered in refrigerator

- Make **sauce** up to *2 days* ahead; store covered in refrigerator (may need to thin with additional milk when reheating)
- Assemble entire casserole up to *1 day* ahead; cover and refrigerate, then add *5 minutes* to initial 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

## Serving Suggestions

- Serve hot from the oven while **crispy fried onions** are still crunchy
- Excellent as a complete meal with a simple green salad
- Pairs well with roasted vegetables or steamed green beans
- Can be served as a side dish for larger gatherings (serves 8-10 as side)
- Leftovers make excellent packed lunches; reheat thoroughly
- Garnish with additional fresh herbs (parsley, chives) if desired