

Cajun Chicken and Rice Casserole

- 1 pound chicken breast, boneless and skinless, cut into chunks
- 4 cups chicken broth, low-sodium
- 2 cups long grain white or wild rice
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 1 onion
- 1 red bell pepper, medium, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 3 bacon slices
- 2 teaspoons canola oil
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- salt and pepper, to taste
- fresh parsley, for garnish

add 1 cup Monterey Jack Cheese
the last 10 minutes of cooking

PREPARATION

1. Combine garlic powder, smoked paprika, cayenne pepper, and dried thyme with the salt and pepper. Toss half of this mixture with the chicken.
2. Cook bacon in a 6-quart Dutch oven until crisp, about 5 minutes on medium-high heat. Transfer to a paper towel to drain.
3. Add the canola oil and chicken to the Dutch oven, and cook it for about three minutes, or until brown. Stir occasionally, and when done, transfer to a bowl.
4. Add the red pepper, onion, and the rest of the spices to the pot, and stir and cook for five minutes. Add the tomato paste, stir, and cook for an additional 30 seconds.
5. Add the broth, peas, rice, and 1/8 teaspoon of salt, if desired. Heat the mixture on high until it boils, and then reduce to a simmer.
6. Add the chicken and remaining juices, and cover to simmer for approximately 25-30 minutes, or until rice is tender and chicken is thoroughly cooked through.
7. Top the dish with parsley and crumbled bacon and serve.