

CASSEROLE RECIPES

When you've had a long day, the last thing you need is to come home and spend an hour or more getting dinner to the table. Fortunately for us all, the casserole can step in from your freezer inventory and be ready in short order.

The casserole, as a meal-in-a-pot, has been around since ancient times. It was the French, in the 19th century, who gave us the name, casserole (cocotte) which identified the container rather than specific contents. In general, a casserole is any large, deep oven proof container in which the ingredients, usually vegetables, cooked meats and fish are mixed or layered, with a base of pasta or rice in a sauce. Today, known by a number of names, casserole recipes are found in nearly every cuisine around the world.

There are thousands of combinations to be made from such ingredients. Casserole recipes abound, online and in cookbooks. With a bit of practice, you can make your own recipes, using your favorite ingredients in combinations pleasing to your family. The contents take ingredients from nearly all the food groups and make a substantial, nutritious and satisfying meal. Served with a dinner salad and a chunk of bread, even a teen's voracious appetite and taste buds are made happy by the end of the meal.

One major advantage of casserole recipes is that you can make most ahead of time. You can take them straight from the frig to the oven for a quick meal. If you double the recipe, one may be frozen for use up to three months later.

When you plan to freeze a casserole, line your dish with heavy foil of sufficient size to cover the top of the dish when cooked. Pop the casserole, dish and all, into the freezer. When frozen, lift the entire casserole from the dish and wrap it foil and all, in a sealable freezer bag. Your casserole dish is again ready for another task and you have a ready-to-go meal to fill in future menus.

The diversity of ingredients contained in casserole recipes is indeed a boon to the cook. Much like the omelette, ingredients can be pretty much what you'd like to combine. Casserole recipes are good candidates for substitutions of your choice. If you find a recipe featuring green beans, corn may do just as well. This versatility allows you to make good use of leftovers.

Many cooks believe that seasoning is the soul of any dish. Different seasonings can make the same ingredients a totally new taste experience. So don't hesitate to vary your seasonings.

The same is true of your sauce. Simple white sauces, gravy made of chicken or

beef broths and thin sauces of orange juice, ginger and butter drizzled over rice, chicken and vegetables are just a few of the possibilities.

Make casserole recipes a first choice when filling out your menus. You'll gain variety, value and save time for future meals, all while satisfying your family's appetite.