

Summer Squash Casserole

Adapted by Our Young Chefs from "Lighten Up, Y'all,"
by Virginia Willis

Makes 8 cups to serve 8 OR 16 to 18 snack-size servings

There are many variations of this Southern classic. Some use cans of creamed soup; others use egg and mayonnaise combinations or heavy cream and bread crumbs. A good way to make a recipe like this healthier is to make a béchamel sauce (or white sauce) with low-fat milk and add a combination of low-fat and regular cheddar cheese. The casserole is less fatty and still delicious, particularly with the addition of fresh herbs. Try mixing summer squash varieties for a new experience and variety.



INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ sweet onion, $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice

2 to 3 small zucchini squash, sliced
 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick (about 1 to
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds)

3 yellow squash, sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick
(about to $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds)

1-inch water in a 6- to 8-quart
saucepan

1 teaspoon salt



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2 ounces 50% reduced-fat cheese
plus 2 ounces regular Cheddar
OR 1 cup (4 to 5 ounces) freshly
shredded sharp Cheddar cheese

DIRECTIONS

Prepare the onion: Cut an onion in half lengthwise (from root to stem end); peel. Cut one onion half into $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice; set aside in a bowl until used later.

Squash: Wash the zucchini and yellow squash under cool running water; it is helpful to use a vegetable brush when washing the squash to remove any fine dirt that may cling to the skin. Pat dry with a towel. Slice the squash into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick slices.

Pre-cook the squash: In a 6- to 8-quart saucepan, bring 1 inch water to a rolling boil over high heat; when the water boils, add the salt. Place the zucchini and yellow squash in a steamer basket; set the steamer basket of squash over the boiling water, place the lid on the pan. Steam the squash until it is *just crisp tender*, about 5 minutes.

Alternate method for pre-cooking the squash: Place all of the squash in a microwave-safe bowl; *lightly* sprinkle with salt. Cook on high power until tender, about 4 minutes, depending on the strength of your microwave.

Remove the steamer insert from the pan OR, if using the microwave, drain away any excess water in the bottom of the bowl; pat the squash dry with a kitchen or paper towel. Set aside in a medium/large mixing bowl.

Cheese: Using the large holes on a box grater, shred the cheese. If using the combination of reduced-fat and regular cheese, combine the 2 shredded cheeses; toss to blend.

Measure $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the shredded cheese; set aside in a small bowl to be used later for the sauce. The remaining cheese (a generous $\frac{1}{4}$ cup) will be added to the herbed bread crumbs for the TOPPING; set aside in a separate small bowl. ➡

$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ cup mixed fresh herbs
(such as flat-leafed parsley,
chives, and basil), coarsely
chopped

2 slices whole wheat bread, with
crust, each slice torn into 4
pieces

Bowl of cooked crisp-tender squash
(prepared earlier)

$\frac{1}{4}$ -cup shredded cheese (prepared
earlier)

To the food processor bowl with the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup herb crumbs, add the generous $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup shredded cheese; pulse *briefly* to incorporate the cheese. Set aside until used later for the TOPPING.

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup 2% milk, warmed

$\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons canola oil
Diced onion (prepared earlier)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black
pepper
1 tablespoon unbleached all-purpose
flour
Warm milk (prepared above)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup shredded cheese (prepared
earlier)

Bowl of squash and herb crumbs
(prepared earlier)

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

TOPPING

Crumb/herb/cheese mixture
(prepared earlier)

Prepare the herb/crumb mixture: Wash the fresh herbs under cool running water; dry by gently tossing in a cloth kitchen towel *OR* using a salad spinner. Coarsely chop; set aside.

Place the bread in the work bowl of a food processor or mini-prep food processor fit with a metal knife blade. Pulse with several long on-off pulses to create soft bread crumbs. Add the coarsely chopped fresh herbs; process with multiple long on-off pulses until the herbs have been chopped into the bread crumbs.

Remove *all but* a generous $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the herb crumbs. Add the crumbs that are removed from the processor to the bowl of crisp-tender cooked squash.

Prepare the béchamel sauce (white sauce): Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly coat a medium ovenproof casserole dish with nonstick cooking spray.

In a very small saucepan over medium heat *OR* in a glass liquid measuring cup in the microwave oven on high power (approximately 1 minute 20 seconds), heat the milk just until the milk begins to bubble around the edges. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a 2-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add the diced onion, salt and pepper; sauté for 2 to 3 minutes, or until translucent. Add the flour; stirring constantly, cook until very pale blonde, about 1 minute. Add the warm milk; whisk until smooth. Bring to a boil, whisking constantly over high heat. When the sauce boils, allow it to cook for 1 minute longer, stirring constantly. Remove from the heat. Add the reserved $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cheese to the sauce; stir to combine.

Assemble, bake and serve the casserole: Pour the cheese sauce over the squash and herbed bread crumbs, gently stir with a flexible spatula to combine. Crack the eggs into a small bowl *OR* a 1-cup liquid measuring cup; beat with a fork *OR* a small whisk to blend. Add the eggs to the squash mixture. Gently stir with the flexible spatula to incorporate the eggs into the squash casserole mixture; transfer to the prepared casserole dish. Sprinkle the reserved crumb/herb/cheese mixture on top of the squash casserole. Bake at 350°F until firm and brown on top, about 30 minutes.

Remove to a rack to cool for about 5 minutes; serve warm.
