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Recipe Finder

Chile Relleno Casserole

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On Dec. 24, 2020, Lynda Finch spent all day cooking for her family's Christmas meal. Among the dishes she prepared was this homey chile relleno casserole with layers of cumin-spiced beef, cheddar, eggs, and canned poblano peppers — an ingredient readily available in grocery stores where she lived in Bakersfield, Calif. She tucked the unbaked casserole into the refrigerator and left the recipe on the countertop next to the oven.

That night Lynda died in her sleep. Her family gathered on Christmas, now to mourn rather than celebrate, and as distraught as they were, they finished baking, warming and relishing the last dishes Lynda had made for them. "I really believe that was her last gift to us," says Michael Finch, the middle of her three sons.

This recipe can easily be halved. If canned poblanos are hard to track down, broil and process fresh poblanos (see NOTE). This will add extra 25 or so minutes for prep. Canned chopped green chiles work in a pinch, but won't yield the same layering effect.

Active time: 35 mins; **Total time:** 1 hour 20 mins

Make Ahead: The unbaked casserole can be assembled, covered tightly and refrigerated for up to 2 days. Take the chill off by resting it on a countertop for about 30 minutes. Then, bake as directed.

Storage Notes: Leftover casserole can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.

Where to Buy: Canned poblanos can be found at Mexican markets and online at mexgrocer.com.

SERVINGS:

When you scale a recipe, keep in mind that cooking times and temperatures, pan sizes and seasonings may be affected, so adjust accordingly. Also, amounts listed in the directions will not reflect the changes made to ingredient amounts.

Tested size: 4-6 About 8 cups

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound ground beef, preferably 90/10 blend
 - 1 cup (4 ounces) chopped yellow onion
 - 2 teaspoons ground cumin
 - 1 teaspoon fine salt, divided
 - 3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 - Unsalted butter, for greasing
 - 1 (27 1/2 ounce) can whole poblano peppers, drained (may substitute 6 large fresh poblanos; see NOTE)
 - 2 cups (8 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese
 - 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
 - 1 1/2 cups (350 milliliters) whole milk
 - 4 large eggs, beaten
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DIRECTIONS

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees.

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, cook the beef and onions, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon and browning the beef until it just starts to turn crispy, about 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the beef mixture to a medium bowl, leaving behind as much fat as possible in the pan. Season the mixture with the cumin, 3/4 teaspoon of the salt and the black pepper.

Grease a 9-inch square baking dish with the butter or the fat rendered from the beef. Gently remove the stems and seeds from the poblanos and open the peppers so the flesh lies flat. Line the bottom of the pan with the poblanos, skin side down, overlapping them some to cover completely. Chop any remaining poblanos and set aside. Layer the meat-onion mixture over the whole poblanos and top with the shredded cheese and reserved chopped peppers.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour and the remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt. While whisking, gradually pour in the milk, breaking up any clumps of flour. Whisk in the eggs and evenly pour the mixture into the baking dish.

Bake the casserole for 45 minutes, or until it has puffed and browned. Remove from the oven and serve.

NOTE: To use fresh rather than canned poblanos, position an oven rack 4 to 6 inches from the oven's broiler element; preheat to broil. Place the poblanos on a large, rimmed baking sheet and broil until they brown in spots and blister without charring, watching them carefully and turning them with tongs until they are blistered all over. Transfer them to a heatproof bowl and cover with a plate or pan lid to let them steam and cool enough to be handled, at least 10 minutes. When the poblanos are cool enough to handle, use your fingers to carefully remove and discard their skins. Make a vertical slit from the stem end to the tip of each pepper. Gently remove the seeds and stems and open the peppers so the flesh lies flat.

RECIPE SOURCE

Adapted by Caroline Hatchett from a recipe by Lynda Finch.

Tested by Hattie Ulan.