

If you want to serve this on a board or platters, a springform pan makes it easier.



Mexican Tortilla Casserole

Serves 4 to 6

Vegetarian

Essentially a lasagna with tortillas standing in for noodles, this is one of those dishes that can miraculously be on the table in short order, made from things you most likely have in your pantry and fridge. If you don't like, or you don't have, one of the ingredients, skip it. Or, if you have something else that you think might be appealing all layered in (like slivered bell peppers to sauté with the onions, kale, chopped cooked broccoli—whatever the people in your home will eat), then fling it on in.

Nonstick cooking spray

1 tablespoon olive, vegetable, or canola oil

1 onion, chopped

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1½ teaspoons chili powder

1 teaspoon minced garlic

1 can (14 ounces) chopped tomatoes, drained, with ⅓ cup juice reserved

¼ cup tomato paste (see Cooking Tip, page 196)

2 cans (15.5 ounces each) white, black, or kidney beans (or a mixture of any two), rinsed and drained

Kosher or coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 can (15 ounces) sweet corn kernels, drained, or 1½ cups frozen corn, thawed

3 cups coarsely chopped spinach

4 medium-size (8-inch) flour tortillas

2 cups (8 ounces) shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese

Chopped fresh cilantro (optional; see Nobody's Neutral on Cilantro, page 185), for garnish

Sour cream (optional), for serving

Salsa (optional), for serving

This is one of those lifesaving blueprint recipes you can go to on rushed weekday evenings.

Make Ahead: This can be assembled up to a day ahead of time, then covered and refrigerated. Bake before serving. It can also be baked, then refrigerated, and reheated in a 350°F oven for 20 minutes until warm.

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Spray a 9-inch round cake pan, springform pan, or baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, cumin, chili powder, and garlic and cook until you can smell the spices and the onion is softened, about 3 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes with the $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of reserved juice and the tomato paste, then stir in the beans. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Let the bean mixture simmer until everything is hot, about 3 minutes. Add the corn and spinach and stir until the spinach has wilted and everything is well blended and hot, about 3 minutes. Taste for seasonings, adding more salt and/or pepper as necessary.
3. Place 1 tortilla in the prepared cake pan. Spread one fourth of the bean and vegetable mixture evenly over the tortilla, then sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the shredded cheese evenly over the top. Repeat with 3 more layers, ending with the last quarter of the bean mixture and then the last $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of shredded cheese.
4. Bake the tortilla casserole until it is hot throughout and the top is lightly browned, about 20 minutes. Let the casserole sit for about 5 minutes, then cut it into wedges using a sharp knife and serve it with a spatula or better yet a pie server. Sprinkle the top with cilantro, if desired, and serve with sour cream and/or salsa on the side, if you like.

BAGGED PREWASHED SPINACH—BIG FAN

Prewashed baby spinach is a fantastic time-saver, since bunches of regular spinach can be extremely dirty, and rinsing those bunches of spinach is right up there with scrubbing the shower grout in terms of joyless tasks. With that said, if you get fresh spinach from a farmers' market or a garden, clearly it's worth the effort to clean it.



A nice wedge of what is basically Mexican lasagna.



Cooking Tip: You can make the tortilla casserole a day ahead of time, cover it with plastic wrap or aluminum foil, and put it in the fridge overnight; just take it out and let it sit at room temperature for about 20 minutes while the oven preheats to 400°F. Bake the casserole uncovered. You can also reheat the cooked casserole at 350°F for 15 to 20 minutes, until warm.

What the Kids Can Do:

They can layer the tortillas, bean mixture, and cheese. Encourage them to distribute the filling evenly across each tortilla and portion everything equally over all four layers.

Non-Vegetarian Note:

I'm sorry to be mentioning the "M" word yet again in the vegetarian chapter, but if you wanted to add some shredded cooked chicken or beef or chopped cooked shrimp to this, it would be delicious. Another brilliant add-in is leftover taco meat, either beef or turkey, from the Taco Night recipe (page 114). Use about two cups of any of these options, and when you make the bean mixture use only one can of beans instead of two. Then, when you are spreading the beans over the tortillas, you'll use a smaller amount of the bean mixture for each layer, followed by a half cup or so of any of the other aforementioned additions over each layer, and then the cheese.