

Make Now, Bake Later: Meals in a Pinch

The refrigerator and freezer are wonderful kitchen tools if you use them to your advantage. From comforting casseroles to hearty soups, go-to dishes have never been easier thanks to the classic preservation methods of refrigeration and freezing. Make grocery shopping a one-stop shop for the week and you can have all the ingredients you need to create a variety of wholesome meals in a snap.



- **Know the storage basics.** Whether it's multiple batches or individual servings of family favorites, proper storing techniques matter. Heavy-duty freezer bags are perfect for keeping sauces, marinades and soups for up to one month, whereas glass containers can provide simple portion control for already assembled dishes. Well-wrapped, double-sealed meals will be less likely to get freezer burn and can be stored for up to two to three months. Make sure to clearly label and date your freezer meals for easy reference.
- **Thaw with care.** There are several ways to thaw out your freezer meals, but only a couple of safe ones. You can place smaller containers in the refrigerator in the morning, and then pop them in the oven in the evening. If you are in a hurry, do a quick thaw by immersing the container in cold water or defrosting it on a low setting in the microwave. Then dial up your oven, set the table and you're good to go!
- **Go Fifty-Fifty.** Double the recipe portion size and serve half to your family now, half later. When time is not on your side, casseroles can be ready to bake at a moment's notice for a quick, fuss-free meal. This Fiesta Chicken Rice & Bean Casserole made with the classic Mexican flavors of jalapeño, cumin, corn and black beans can be enjoyed more than once! The addition of instant chicken bouillon granules and evaporated milk give it an especially savory and creamy flavor.

For more make-ahead recipe ideas, visit www.meals.com

Fiesta Chicken Rice & Bean Casserole

(Makes 6-8 servings)

- 2 cups water
- 2 teaspoons Maggi Instant Chicken Flavor Bouillon
- 3/4 cup long-grain white rice
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup finely chopped onion
- 1 bell pepper, any color, chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and chopped
- 1 to 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 can (12 fluid ounces) Nestlé Carnation Evaporated Milk
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten

- 3 cups cooked, chopped or shredded chicken breast meat (about 3 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves)
- 2 cups (8 ounces) shredded Monterey Jack cheese with jalapeños
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, rinsed well and drained
- 1 ½ cups frozen, thawed corn, drained
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro (optional)

PREHEAT oven to 350° F. Lightly grease 13 x 9-inch or 3-quart casserole dish.

BRING water and bouillon to a boil in medium saucepan. Add rice; cover. Reduce heat to low; cook for 15 to 18 minutes or until rice is *almost* tender and most of liquid is absorbed (the rice will continue to cook in the casserole).

MELT butter in large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, bell pepper, jalapeño and cumin. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 8 minutes or until tender. Stir in garlic; cook for 30 seconds or until fragrant.

WHISK together evaporated milk and eggs; stir into saucepan along with prepared rice, chicken, cheese, beans and corn. Spoon into prepared dish.

BAKE for 40 to 45 minutes or until bubbly and edges are golden. Sprinkle with cilantro before serving.

FOR FREEZE AHEAD:

PREPARE as above using two 2-quart casserole dishes; do not bake or sprinkle with cilantro. Allow casserole to cool to room temperature. Cover tightly with plastic wrap, then with aluminum foil; freeze for up to 2 months. Thaw overnight in refrigerator. Uncover. Preheat oven to 350° F. Bake for 60 to 70 minutes or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Sprinkle with cilantro before serving.

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