

Cheesy Zucchini Bake

Serves 8

Casseroles are great “all-in-one” meals for busy weeknights with meat, starch and vegetables in one dish. This recipe can be prepared in advance and kept in the fridge until you are ready to bake it. If it’s cold add an additional 15 minutes to the cook time.

4 small zucchini, thinly sliced
1 kg ground beef or beef and pork blend
1 large onion chopped
1 large green pepper, chopped or 2 small rainbow peppers
2 cloves garlic minced
2 teaspoons dried mixed Italian seasoning or 1/2 teaspoon each dried basil, oregano, thyme and parsley
1/4 teaspoon crushed red chili flakes (optional)
Salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 - 28 ounce can diced tomatoes and their juices
2 cups cooked brown or wild rice or brown and wild rice mix (or any leftover rice you have)
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese

Slice zucchini into thin rounds. Place the slices in a colander in the sink and sprinkle liberally with salt. Let stand 10-20 minutes to release excess moisture from the zucchini. Rinse well and place zucchini rounds on paper towels to dry while you prepare the meat.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9 x 13 inch baking dish with non-stick cooking spray.

In a large skillet over medium-high brown the ground meat until no trace of pink remains. Remove the pan from the heat and push the meat to one side of the pan. Tilt the pan by the handle and using a large spoon remove all but 2 tablespoons of the fat to a heat proof bowl or Pyrex measuring cup. Return the pan to medium-high heat and add onions, peppers and garlic. Sauté 2-3 minutes. Add seasonings and tomato paste and cook 2-3 minutes more. Stir in diced tomatoes and cooked rice.

Bring the mixture to a boil and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer for 10 minutes to blend flavours. Do not let mixture get too dry, if it does add 1/2 cup of water or broth. Taste and adjust seasonings if needed.

Place 1/3 of the meat mixture in the bottom of your baking dish. Top with half of the zucchini slices. Place another 1/3 of the meat over the zucchini then add another layer of zucchini. Cover with the remaining meat mixture. Top with the shredded mozzarella cheese.

Bake uncovered 30-40 minutes or until casserole is bubbling and cheese is browned. Let stand 5 minutes and serve.

**Cost Breakdown from Food Basics flyer week of February 25, 2016
(not including pantry items)**

Lean Ground Beef-Pork Blend: \$2.77 per pound/\$6.11 per kilogram – \$7.00 per package

Zucchini: \$0.98 per pound/\$2.16 per kilogram – use 4 about \$1.65

Large Green Pepper: \$8.75 per kilogram – use 1 – about \$2.00

Primo Diced Tomatoes: \$0.99 per 28 oz/796ml can - \$0.99

Mozzarella Cheese: \$4.99 per 450g block – use 1/2 a block – about \$2.50

Total cost of ingredients: \$14.14

Cost per Person based on 8 servings: \$1.76