**Extraordinary Enchilada Casserole**

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| **Ingredients:**18 corn tortillas (I could only get a packet of 16 - that's fine!)1 28 oz. can crushed tomatoes2 28 oz. cans MILD enchilada sauce (I could only find 10 oz. cans.  If you get 10 oz. cans - get 6 of them.  Yes, you really need this much sauce!)1 15 oz. can black beans (drained)1 15 oz. can chickpeas (drained)1 15 oz. can corn (drained)1 large red onion, diced (yellow onion can be substituted)1 bunch scallions (green stalk minced and reserved for plating; white portion diced and used for filling)1/2 lb. grated cheddar cheese1/2 lb. grated monterey jack cheese2 garlic cloves, minced2 Tbsp. olive oil1 - 2 avocados, sliced (optional, for plating)1 lime (optional; if using avocado slices, lime juice squeezed over them will prevent them from turning brown and provide a slight complimentary tangy flavor)sour cream (optional; added at plating)1 small bunch cilantro, minced (If you don't like cilantro, don't use it.) | To carnivorize this dish: (optional)2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cooked and shredded, blended with 1/2 of the seasoning blend\*  <--I usually do this a day ahead of time.  You could use leftover shredded roast chicken, too.- or - 1 lb. ground beef, cooked with 1/2 of the seasoning blend\*, drained- or - 12 oz. steak, grilled and shredded, blended with 1/2 of the seasoning blend\* <--I usually do this a day ahead of time, or you can use leftover steak.- or - 1 lb. total ground beef/pork/veal, cooked with 1/2 of the seasoning blend\*, drained\*Seasoning Blend:1 Tbsp. cumin1 Tbsp. smoked paprika (regular paprika is fine)2 tsp. salt2 tsp. oregano (dried) |

**Instructions:**

1.  Add all of the enchilada sauce and crushed tomatoes to a large saucepan.  Simmer on medium-low heat, stirring every five minutes so it doesn't scorch.  Continue simmering while you prepare the rest of the dish.  This might seem like a lot of sauce, but the enchiladas will absorb it.  Plus, you will want to add extra when serving.  Any portions that you reheat will need additional sauce, too.

2.  Add 2 Tbsp. olive oil to a pre-heated large sauté pan, on medium-high heat.  Add the onion and white parts of the scallion to the pan.

3. While the onion and scallions are sautéing, drain and rinse the beans, corn, and chickpeas.  Add them to the pan.

4.  Add the rest of the seasoning blend.  Stir.  Sauté for 8-10 minutes stirring frequently.  At this point, remove the enchilada sauce from the heat.

5. Technically, when you buy a bag of corn tortillas, they are not cooked, per se.  Applying a little bit of heat to them really brings out their flavor and will give a very authentic taste to the dish.

If you are NOT using meat in your filling, you can get by with using one 9"x13" oven-safe baking dish.  If you ARE using meat in your filling, plan on using one 9"x13" baking dish and another 9"x9" baking dish to accommodate all ingredients.

Toast your tortillas directly on the burners of your stove, using tongs.  Toast them on both sides for about 20 seconds on each side.  Do this directly on the stove - no pan!  If you get a few burn spots on the tortillas, that's ok.

6.  Ladle some enchilada sauce in the bottom of your baking dish(es) to coat the bottom, spreading evenly.

7.  Take the tortillas one at a time and dip them right into the pot with the enchilada sauce, so they are coated with sauce on both sides.  Then place them in the 9"x13" baking dish (and if also using a 9"x9" baking dish) as shown below.  3 whole tortillas down the middle of the 9"x13" baking dish, and 3 half-tortillas on each side will cover that dish perfectly.

8.  Add an even layer of filling across the entire dish(es), patting down with your spoon as you go.

9.  Add a few more ladles of sauce.

10. Preheat the oven to 350°.

11.  Add half of the cheeses, sprinkled evenly on top.

12.  Repeat step 7, adding another tortillas-dipped-in-sauce layer to each baking dish.

13.  Ladle some sauce over the top of the tortillas.

14.  Sprinkle the top with the remaining cheese.

15.  Bake for 40 minutes uncovered.

16.  Let the dish rest for at least 15 minutes prior to serving to let it settle.   Meanwhile, slice the avocado and squeeze some lime juice over the slices; get your garnishes ready.

17.  Ladle some sauce onto the bottom of a plate.  Place a portion of the enchilada casserole over it.  Sprinkle it with some scallions.  Arrange a few avocado slices on top, with a dollop of sour cream.  Finish plating with a sprinkle of cilantro, if desired.

**Special Notes:**

All garnishes are optional.  However, the flavors enhance the main dish.

You can assemble the dish ahead of time and refrigerate it for up to a day.  If you refrigerate the dish before baking, bake it at 350°, for 60 minutes instead of 40 minutes.

This recipe is a base for more inventive enchilada casseroles.  You can try adding shredded pork, or different leftover meats.  If you like heat, try adding minced jalapeños to the filling mixture when sautéing, or add them as a garnish.

Chef Jeff prefers not to add meat to the filling and leave the dish vegetarian, when baking.  Afterwards, he will plate the dish with the heated, seasoned meat at the bottom, a portion of enchilada casserole placed on top, extra sauce, sliced avocado, sour cream, green scallions, and an extra squeeze of lime juice all over the top.

You can definitely freeze leftovers!  Don't freeze it with the garnishes, though.  Just make sure you freeze extra enchilada sauce separately on the side, so you can rehydrate the dish when serving.