

Country Sausage Breakfast Casserole

Serves: 8-10

Prep: 20 minute assembly & overnight in the fridge. 1 hour to bake & 10 minutes to rest

On weekends, or on any holiday where sleeping in is the order of the day, I love tucking into a big, late morning breakfast or brunch. What I don't like is all the heavy cooking a big breakfast entails. This overnight recipe is the perfect solution. Whip it up, stick it in the fridge, and bake it about an hour and a half before you need it. While it's baking, there's plenty of time to lay out a basket of bagels with cream cheese or a tray of store-bought pastries. You could also change things up by serving it with a yogurt bar including my Homemade Granola with dried fruit mix-ins, and a squeeze bottle of honey. If you're going all in--which we usually do for Christmas or Easter--include some fresh fruit and don't forget the juice!

Ingredients

1 16 oz. package Neese's Southern Style Country Sausage, or your favorite sausage
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium yellow onion, 1/4-inch dice
1 green bell pepper, 1/4-inch dice
1 red bell pepper, 1/4-inch dice
2 teaspoons dry Italian seasoning
1 teaspoon coarse kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon fresh black pepper

12 large eggs
1 1/2 cups milk
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
5 cups (28 oz. bag) prepared O'Brien hash browns, defrosted
4 cups finely shredded fiesta blend or sharp cheddar cheese, divided

1. Grease a 13x9-inch (3-quart) baking dish with cooking spray or, using a napkin, grease with a thin layer of Crisco (preferred).
2. In a large skillet cook the sausage over medium heat, breaking into pieces, until all pink is gone. Strain, set aside to cool. In the skillet, melt the butter, add the diced onion and sauté for about two minutes until they are softened. (I know what you're thinking: "Why discard the pork fat and replace it with butter?!" I've tried it both ways and I'm here to tell you that the butter adds incredible flavor to the veggies. What can I say?! Butter is boss!) Next, add the peppers, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper, and sauté together until the onions are translucent and the peppers are tender, about 4-5 minutes more. Set aside to cool slightly.



3. In a large bowl, beat the eggs, milk, and mustard with a whisk until well combined. Stir in hash browns, 3 cups of shredded cheese, pork, and sautéed veggies. Pour the mixture into the greased baking dish, spread it out evenly, and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours but no longer than 12 hours.

4. When ready to bake, remove the dish from the fridge and preheat the oven to 350°F. Bake uncovered for 60 to 70 minutes or until the center is just set. Remove from the oven and top with 1 cup shredded cheese. Cover with aluminum foil and allow to rest 10 minutes before serving. Store any leftovers in an air-tight container in the fridge for up to 3 days.

Tips:

- No dish looks quite finished without a small garnish. This Country Sausage Breakfast Casserole looks especially delicious with your choice of any one of the following:

- 2 tablespoons cup finely sliced green onions, cut on a bias
- 1 tablespoon of fresh, diced chives
- 1 tablespoon fresh, diced flat-leaf parsley

Fresh is always best for both flavor and color but you can also use dried chives or parsley in a pinch. Just 1 to 2 teaspoons of either one, dried, would add a nice finishing touch.

- If you like a little heat with your eggs, add a finely diced and seeded jalapeno or two into step 2 and a few dashes of hot sauce into step 3. Serve with fresh Pico de Gallo or your favorite jar of salsa and a cooling dollop of sour cream.

