

Homestyle Crunchy-Topped Chicken Casserole

MED *Work Intensity*

CSA Greens?

One-pot Option?

Prep Foods:

- cooked chicken
- chicken stock
- (bread crumbs)

Equipment:

- 8x8" or 2-qt. casserole dish OR
- large cast iron skillet OR
- Dutch oven

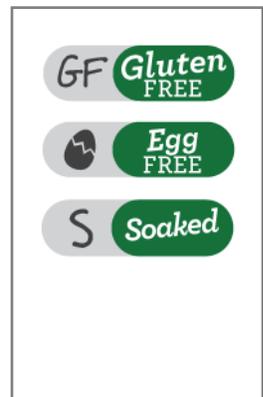
This recipe was sent to me to reverse engineer more than any other – at least three people requested it, and some even referred me to a partially real food version at Tammy's Recipes. I fiddled with it a lot to get the topping and the spices right, and then to include a gluten-free version. I am really pleased with the end result and all the time-saving shortcuts, too!

Ingredients

- 4 Tbs. butter (½ stick)
- 4 celery ribs, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ½ c. flour (4-6 Tbs. arrowroot or corn starch for GF)
- 1 ½ c. milk + ½ c. chicken stock (could use 2 c. milk)
- 2 c. cooked, shredded chicken
- optional: 1-4 carrots, sliced or shredded, and
1-2 c. broccoli, chopped, including stems
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper

Stuffing Remake

- 2-3 c. bread crumbs OR bread torn or cut into 1/2" pieces
- ¼ c. butter
- 1 tsp. dried parsley
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder
- ¼ tsp. onion powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- ¼ tsp. dried powdered thyme
- ¼ tsp. dried sage
- ¼ tsp. celery seed
- OR
- just 1 tsp. poultry seasoning in place of the thyme, sage and celery seed



Method

In a medium to large pot, melt ¼ cup butter for the stuffing remake. Meanwhile, mix all the spices for the stuffing mix in a medium-sized bowl.

Pour the melted butter into the bowl of spices and mix.

In the same pot, get another ¼ cup of butter melting. Chop onions and celery, then add them to the melted butter. (Optional carrots and broccoli stems, too.) Stir and sauté for about 5-7 minutes over medium or medium-high heat until everything is softened. For added depth of flavor, cook longer, up to 20 minutes to caramelize the onions.

While the veggies are cooking, mix up the stuffing topping.

Stuffing options:

1. Use 2-3 c. homemade bread crumbs.
2. Use 2-3 slices homemade bread or equivalent cornbread, cut or torn into ½” cubes and toasted in a 200-300F oven (or toaster oven, even better) for 10-30 minutes (until completely crispy, not just “toasted”). One large-ish slice of bread is about 1 cup (homemade bread varies so much!).
3. Use fresh bread or cornbread, cut or torn into ½” cubes to make 2-3 cups.

Stir your choice of topping into the butter/spice mixture in the bowl, lightly crushing bread/toast into smaller pieces.

We found that fresh bread works great and crisps up in the oven once on the casserole, so unless you really want super-crunchy toppings, save a step and don't toast first.

Back to the main pot: Once the onions and celery are limp, add ½ cup whole wheat flour to the pot. Mix and cook for about a minute once bubbly. Add milk and chicken stock all at once and bring the mixture up to a boil over medium to high heat, stirring well and often until thickened. If you're in a hurry, cover the pot, but watch for scalding milk.

GF adaptation: Instead of flour, use arrowroot or corn starch. Pour the chicken broth and only 1 cup milk into the pot after softening the vegetables. Bring to a boil. Whisk starch into the remaining ½ cup milk and pour into the boiling mixture. Stir well and often over medium heat until thickened (it doesn't take long).

Then add chicken, salt, pepper and optional extra vegetables, like greens or shredded zucchini. Stir well and heat for a minute or two.

Pour soup mixture into an 8x8” glass casserole dish and top with stuffing mixture. (See *Variations for cheese option.*)

Bake, uncovered, at 350F for 30-35 minutes until bubbly and the top is crunchy.

Serves 4 adults.

See the reverse engineering tutorial and the original processed recipe on p. 70.



Timesaver: Utilize your freezer to have chopped celery and cooked chicken ready, and keep the topping as simple as possible.

Make-ahead Instructions: The entire casserole can be made ahead, then refrigerated for a day until you need it. You may want to keep the stuffing mixture separate and add it right before baking, especially if you toasted bread.

How to Reheat: Bake in the oven or toaster oven at 400F for 15 minutes or so, or just put a serving into a pot with a little extra water, stirring a few times to heat evenly.

How to Freeze: Freeze the soup mixture either right in the casserole dish or in a glass jar or plastic bag. Freeze the bread crumbs/bread mixture with spices in a separate plastic bag. *To prepare:* Thaw everything completely. Spread soup in the casserole dish and bake 15-20 minutes at 350F. Remove and stir around a bit, then spread the stuffing remix on top. Continue baking, uncovered, at 350F for 30-35 minutes.

Variations

- GF** ↓ *Gluten-free instructions:* Use gluten-free cornbread (p. 119) (or any GF bread) for topping crumbs, or even try Erewhon brown rice cereal, crushed.
- ↓ *Substitution ideas:* Why not add a few cloves of garlic? Shredded carrots in the sauté and shredded zucchini with the chicken works great too.
- ↓ *Extra creaminess:* Before adding the stuffing mix, sprinkle some shredded cheese or a few slices cheese on top of the creamed chicken mixture.
- ↓ *One-Pot meal?* If you have a cast iron pan or a Dutch oven, just make the whole dish in it and top with stuffing mix, then put it in the oven. You can either bake as directed or, as long as you heat everything thoroughly and leave it on the stovetop long enough to cook the vegetables, just put the whole pot under a broiler on high for 3-7 minutes until the bread crumbs are crisped and browned. Quicker!
- ↓ *Make-ahead white sauce:* You can also use a homemade white sauce that you've made ahead in bulk (p. 106) instead of the flour, milk, salt and pepper. Cut the butter to two tablespoons and sauté the onions and celery, adding the white sauce with the chicken.
- ↓ *Get Spicy!* A tester added curry and cayenne to the sauce, and she mentioned she'll cut the breadcrumbs and serve over rice next time to mimic a family favorite. Just keep changing the recipe bit by bit and make it your own!
- S** ↓ *Soaked option:* Use a good quality soaked or sourdough bread like the rolls on p. 123, the crackers on p. 121 or this sourdough: <http://bit.ly/12Uu3JO> for the topping. Use the GF option with arrowroot starch or use sprouted flour to make the cream soup more digestible.

FAQS

- ↓ *How long does it really take to toast that bread?* I know, that's a big range on the bread crumbs/toasted bread cubes. Denser bread takes a great deal longer, and light, fluffy bread, torn small, gets done quickly. Just set a timer in 3-5 minute increments.
- ↓ *What should I use, milk or broth?* You could certainly use 1 cup broth and 1 cup milk, or thin with water, as long as you have 2 cups of liquid total. Use what you have on hand and trust the other flavors to suffice!
- ↓ *What if I don't have one of the ingredients?* Everything is flexible in this one – there are so many options for topping, the liquids used, veggies, even the spices (minced onion for powder, celery seed, salt – whatever!). Trust that if you fiddle with something, it will be okay!



Little ones love to tear up bread, medium sized kids can measure the spices for the topping and help run the food processor if you're shredding veggies, and older kids, with training, can even stand at the stove and complete the white sauce.

I hope you've enjoyed this sneak peek of Better Than a Box. For all 60 of the recipes, detailed "lesson plans" to make your own meals real-food-i-fied, plus ten bonuses, grab the whole PDF right here: <http://bit.ly/V4pest>