

# Million Dollar Chicken Casserole

10 minutes of prep. Feeds six. Tomorrow's lunch in the same pan.

ACTIVE TIME	TOTAL TIME	SERVINGS	OVEN
10 min	50 min	6	350°F

## INGREDIENTS

### For the filling

- 2 to 3 cups shredded rotisserie chicken
- 1 cup full-fat cottage cheese
- 1 can (10.5 oz) cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- Salt and black pepper to taste

### For the topping

- 1 sleeve Ritz crackers (about 35), crushed
- 4 tbsp butter, melted

## QUICK SUBSTITUTIONS

- **No cottage cheese?** 8 oz softened cream cheese, or 1 cup ricotta.
- **No cream of chicken?** Cream of mushroom soup, 1:1.
- **No sour cream?** Full-fat Greek yogurt, 1:1.
- **No mozzarella?** Cheddar or Colby-Jack melts just as clean.
- **No Ritz?** Panko plus 1 tbsp butter for a crispier top.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat.** Oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13 baking dish with cooking spray or a thin layer of butter.
- 2. Shred the chicken.** Pull breast and thigh meat from the rotisserie chicken. Shred with two forks into bite-sized pieces. You need 2 to 3 cups.
- 3. Mix the filling.** In a large bowl, combine the shredded chicken, cottage cheese, cream of chicken soup, sour cream, mozzarella, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and pepper. Stir until evenly combined.
- 4. Transfer.** Pour the filling into the prepared dish. Spread into an even layer with the back of the spoon.
- 5. Make the topping.** Crush the Ritz inside the sleeve or a zip-top bag. Combine the crumbs with melted butter in a small bowl. Stir until the crumbs look like wet sand.
- 6. Top the casserole.** Spread the buttered crumbs evenly over the filling, all the way to the edges.
- 7. Bake.** Uncovered for 35 to 40 minutes, until the topping is deep golden brown and the edges are bubbling.
- 8. Rest.** Let the casserole sit 5 minutes before serving. The filling needs this time to set so it portions cleanly.

## TIPS THAT ACTUALLY MATTER

### Use full-fat cottage cheese, always.

Low-fat versions release water during baking and thin the filling. Full-fat melts clean and disappears into the sauce. This is the single most common cause of a watery casserole.

### Let it rest for 5 minutes after baking.

Cutting in straight from the oven makes the filling run out of the pan. Five minutes is all it takes for the dairy to set so portions lift cleanly.

### Add the cracker topping right before baking.

If you're prepping ahead, cover the filling alone and refrigerate. Crackers absorb moisture overnight and turn to paste. Top and bake when you're ready.

### Blend the cottage cheese if you're nervous.

Pulse it in a blender or food processor for 10 seconds before mixing. The curds melt during baking anyway, but blending first is the move for picky eaters who sniff out textures.

### Grease the pan. Every time.

Skipping this doubles cleanup. A thin coat of cooking spray or butter takes five seconds and saves you a hot soak later.

### Make two and freeze one.

Assemble a second casserole without the cracker topping. Cover tightly, freeze up to three months. Thaw overnight, top, bake as directed plus 10 to 15 extra minutes.

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## TURN LEFTOVERS INTO THREE MORE MEALS

The casserole is already cooked, seasoned, and creamy. It does not just reheat. It repurposes. Each idea below takes five minutes or less.

<b>CASSEROLE QUESADILLAS</b>	Scoop leftovers onto a flour tortilla. Fold. Cook in a dry skillet over medium heat, 2 minutes per side.
<b>BAKED POTATO TOPPING</b>	Microwave a potato 7 minutes. Split it open. Spoon the leftover casserole over the top. Lunch handled.
<b>CASSEROLE TOAST</b>	Toast a thick slice of sourdough or brioche. Top with a scoop of casserole. Broil 2 minutes until bubbly and golden.

### STORAGE AT A GLANCE

**Fridge:** Airtight container, up to 4 days. Reheat individual portions in the microwave 90 seconds, or reheat the full pan covered at 325°F for 15 minutes to preserve the topping.

**Freezer (baked):** Cool completely, cover tightly with foil, freeze up to 3 months. Reheat covered at 350°F for 20 to 25 minutes, then uncover 10 minutes to re-crisp the topping.

**Freezer (unbaked):** Assemble without the cracker topping. Cover tightly, freeze up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the fridge, add topping, bake as directed plus 10 to 15 minutes.

**Make-ahead (24 hours):** Assemble filling in the dish. Cover and refrigerate. Add the cracker topping right before baking. Bake time adds 5 to 10 minutes from cold.

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