



Kitchen Cheat Sheet: King Ranch Chicken Casserole

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Tips and Time Savers

- Give the aluminum foil a good spray with nonstick cooking spray before covering the casserole. It will keep the melty cheese from sticking.
- Use reduced sodium soups to lower sodium in this recipe if you need to. It will still taste great.
- Save time by using shredded chicken or rotisserie chicken.
- Try frozen green bell peppers or the diced bell peppers and onions in the produce section of the store. This will save you time.
- Assemble this on Sunday night and keep it in the refrigerator. You'll just need to pop it in the oven for a quick meal on the busiest weeknight. Better yet double the recipe and freeze one for another time.
- Manufacturer's have downsized! I've had to downsize the size of the pans - if you've been making this recipe for awhile you may notice that the pan is smaller.

Storage

You can assemble this traditional King Ranch casserole a day or two ahead of time and bake when you're ready.

Let the leftovers come to room temperature and then cover with plastic wrap or put in an airtight container and refrigerate promptly. They'll be fine for 4 or 5 days.

Casseroles like this King Ranch chicken are a life saver for busy people. I like to make a double batch and freeze one for those times when my life is spinning out of control OR someone from church needs dinner.

Let cool to room temperature. Wrap the casserole dish in plastic wrap then in aluminum foil and freeze.

You can freeze this for up to 6 months with no problem and, full disclosure, I once found one in the freezer that was over a year old and it tasted fine.

To thaw- let thaw overnight in the refrigerator, remove aluminum foil and plastic wrap, and bake according to instructions.

Variations

- You can use Monterey Jack or Pepper Jack instead of the Cheddar.
- This works with turkey leftovers or pork leftovers, too.
- You can use boneless skinless chicken thighs instead of chicken breast.
- Substitute tortilla chips for the corn tortillas.
- Use ground beef or leftover taco seasoned beef instead of chicken for a different Tex-Mex twist.

FAQs

Why is it called King Ranch chicken?

No one really knows, and the actual King Ranch in Texas has politely distanced itself from this casserole. What is known is that this recipe showed up in mid-century Texas kitchens and Junior League cookbooks and never left.

I can't find Rotel—what can I use instead?

Use canned diced tomatoes and add a small can of green chiles. It won't be identical, but it'll get you close enough that no one will complain.

Can I use flour tortillas?

You can, but corn tortillas are traditional and hold up better. Flour tortillas tend to get soft and gummy, which is not the goal here.

Is this King Ranch chicken spicy?

Nope. It's mild, family-friendly Tex-Mex comfort food. If you want more heat, use original Rotel or add a pinch of cayenne or diced jalapeño.

Can I make this ahead of time?

Yes, and it's one of those casseroles that behaves beautifully when made ahead. Assemble it, cover it, refrigerate, and bake when you're ready.

Can I freeze King Ranch chicken casserole?

Absolutely. It freezes well before or after baking and reheats without drama—one of the reasons it's been a go-to for decades.

Nice to Have

As an Amazon Associate, I earn commission from qualifying purchases.

I use these Anchor Hocking glass baking dishes constantly, especially for dump cakes and casseroles that like to get a little wild in the oven. You get a 2-quart and 3-quart dish, they bake evenly, clean up without a fight, and the clear glass lets you see what's happening without opening the oven and messing with it. Not fancy, not precious — just solid, dependable, and exactly what you want when you're baking for real life. [get them here](#).