

Summer Squash Baked in Goat Cheese Custard

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The zucchini casserole that appears earlier in this chapter has a generally Mediterranean vibe and takes its name from the original French source, an oval baking pan, *une casserole*. This recipe is closer to an all-American casserole, the mish-mashy delight of weeknight meals and potluck suppers, meant to be cooked in a super-sized rectangular glass baking dish. It is based on my West grandmother's macaroni and cheese, which she made not with béchamel but savory egg custard. Goat cheese complements the flavor of squash, and Parmesan adds umami. The quantities here are enough for a crowd. Baked squash casserole can be served hot, at room temperature, or reheated the next day. Accompany it with almost anything, but my choice would be pork chops or pork tenderloin off the grill plus a plate of sliced Green Zebra tomatoes and a few salad greens.

Serves 12 to 16

8 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 medium yellow or sweet onions, cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
1/2 teaspoon dried savory
1 bay leaf
1/4 teaspoon red chile flakes
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste
1 1/2 teaspoons fine sea salt
4 pounds yellow crookneck squash, sliced in 1/4-inch slices
1 cup dried breadcrumbs
4 large eggs
1 cup organic heavy cream
2 ounces extra-sharp white cheddar cheese, grated (about 3/4 cup)
4 ounces fresh goat cheese, crumbled (about 1/2 cup)
1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (about 1/3 cup)

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Coat a 9 × 13-inch baking dish with 1 tablespoon of the butter.
2. In a rondeau or very large pan, melt 5 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat until it foams. Add the onions, garlic, thyme, savory, bay leaf, chile flakes, black pepper, and 1/2 teaspoon of the salt. Sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes.

3. Add the squash and the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt. Increase the heat to high and sauté until softened, about 10 minutes, stirring often to prevent browning. Transfer the squash to a colander set in the sink to drain for 10 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter. Stir in the bread crumbs to coat. Set aside.
5. In a very large bowl, whisk together the eggs, cream, cheddar, goat cheese, and Parmesan. Add the drained squash and black pepper to taste. Stir to combine.
6. Turn the mixture into the prepared baking dish and top with the bread crumbs. Transfer to the oven and bake, uncovered, until deeply browned and bubbling, 45 to 50 minutes.