Chicken Parmesan Casserole

Combine cooked shredded chicken, slightly underdone penne and marinara in a baking dish. Finish with mozzarella and buttery crumbs, baking until the casserole center reaches 165°F (74°C).

SERVES 4	PREP 20 min	COOK 45 min	EXTRA 5 min



Ingredients

- 3 cups (420 g) cooked shredded chicken
- 8 oz (225 g) dry penne pasta
- 3 cups (720 ml) marinara sauce
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) water
- 1 tsp (1 g) dried oregano
- 1/4 tsp (0.5 g) black pepper
- 1 1/2 cups (170 g) shredded mozzarella made with microbial or vegetarian rennet
- 1/2 cup (45 g) vegetarian Parmesan-style hard cheese, finely grated, divided
- 3/4 cup (45 g) panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tbsp (14 g) unsalted butter, melted
- 2 tbsp (4 g) torn fresh basil

Method

1. Heat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Boil penne in a large pot of water for 2 minutes less than its package time, then drain. Use a 9-by-13-inch (23-by-33-cm) baking dish.
2. Combine pasta, cooked chicken, marinara, measured water, oregano, pepper, half the mozzarella and half the grated hard cheese in the dish.
3. Cover with foil and bake for 15 to 20 minutes. Mix panko with melted butter and remaining hard cheese.
4. Remove foil, sprinkle over remaining mozzarella and the crumb mixture and bake uncovered for 8 to 12 minutes until the center reaches 165°F (74°C).
5. Let stand for 5 minutes, scatter basil over the top and divide into 4 generous portions.

Doneness & safe handling

Use fully cooked chicken. Check the center of the assembled casserole and several portions reach 165°F (74°C) before serving, including when baked directly from refrigeration.

Cook’s notes

Undercook the pasta slightly before baking so it keeps its shape.

Common mistake

A dry sauce or fully cooked pasta can leave a dense or mushy casserole.

Variations

For a vegetable-rich version, replace 2 oz (55 g) dry pasta with 2 cups (180 g) steamed, well-drained broccoli. Fully cooked chicken nuggets can replace shredded chicken; follow their label and verify the casserole reaches 165°F (74°C).

Serving

Divide the cooked chicken and the listed pasta, rice, potatoes or vegetables among 4 plates or bowls. Spoon over the finished sauce where present and serve promptly.

Storage

Use previously cooked chicken within its original 3-to-4-day refrigeration window; baking does not reset that window. Refrigerate promptly in shallow covered containers within 2 hours, or within 1 hour above 90°F (32°C). Keep at 40°F (4°C) or below and use within 3 to 4 days. Do not wait for a large batch to cool completely on the counter.

Freezing

Freeze promptly cooled portions airtight at 0°F (-18°C) or below for up to 3 months for best quality. Thaw in the refrigerator. Cheese and crumb toppings may soften after thawing.

Reheating

Reheat portions gently in a covered skillet or the microwave, adding a little water if needed and stirring or turning for even heating. Check the thickest chicken and any casserole center reaches 165°F (74°C). Do not reheat chilled leftovers in a slow cooker.

Quick questions

Can I use shredded chicken? Yes. Fully cooked shredded chicken is the starting point here.

Can I assemble ahead? Refrigerate the assembled casserole promptly for up to 24 hours, within the chicken storage window; bake until its center reaches 165°F (74°C), allowing extra time from cold.

Recipe references: Spend With Pennies - cooked chicken and pasta casserole technique • https://www.spendwithpennies.com/quick-chicken-parmesan-casserole/comment-page-1/
USDA FSIS - safe minimum poultry temperature • https://ask.fsis.usda.gov/article/What-is-a-safe-internal-temperature-for-cooking-meat-and-poultry
USDA FSIS - chilling and storage of leftovers • https://ask.fsis.usda.gov/article/How-do-I-handle-leftovers-safely
USDA FSIS - safe food handling and reheating • https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/steps-keep-food-safe