Ultimate Green Bean Casserole

SERVES 10 TO 12
TIME 1½ HOURS

Why This Works: The classic combination of green beans, condensed soup, and canned onions isn't bad. But for a holiday centered on homemade food, shouldn't every dish be great? We wanted to upgrade green bean casserole to give it fresh, homemade flavor. Our first tasting determined that we definitely needed to use fresh green beans rather than frozen or canned beans. A preliminary blanching and shocking prepared the beans to finish cooking perfectly in the casserole, enabling them to keep a consistent texture and retain their beautiful green color. For our sauce, we made a mushroom variation of the classic French velouté sauce (chicken broth thickened with a roux made from butter and flour, then finished with heavy cream). Our biggest challenge was the onion topping. Ultimately we found that the canned onions couldn't be entirely replaced without sacrificing the level of convenience we thought appropriate to the dish, but we masked their "commercial" flavor with freshly made buttered bread crumbs.



TOPPING

- **3 slices hearty white sandwich bread, torn into quarters**
- **2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- **¼ teaspoon salt**
- **⅛ teaspoon pepper**
- **1 (6-ounce) can fried onions (3 cups)**

GREEN BEANS AND SAUCE

- **2 pounds green beans, trimmed and halved crosswise**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **3 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- **1 pound white mushrooms, trimmed and broken into ½-inch pieces**
- **3 garlic cloves, minced**
- **3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- **1½ cups chicken broth**
- **1½ cups heavy cream**

Before You Begin: The components of the casserole can be prepared ahead of time. Store the bread-crumb topping in an airtight container in the refrigerator and combine with the onions just before cooking. Combine the beans and cooled sauce in a baking dish, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for up to 24 hours. To serve, remove the plastic wrap and heat the casserole in a 425-degree oven for 10 minutes, then add the topping and bake as directed. This recipe can be halved and baked in a 2-quart (or 8-inch-square) baking dish. If making a half batch, reduce the cooking time of the sauce in step 3 to about 6 minutes (1¾ cups) and the baking time in step 4 to 10 minutes.

1. FOR THE TOPPING: Pulse bread, butter, salt, and pepper in food processor until mixture resembles coarse crumbs, about 10 pulses. Transfer to large bowl and toss with onions; set aside.

2. FOR THE GREEN BEANS AND SAUCE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line baking sheet with paper towels. Fill large bowl halfway with ice and water. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in Dutch oven. Add green beans and 2 tablespoons salt and cook until bright green and crisp-tender, about 6 minutes. Drain green beans and transfer to ice bath to cool. Drain again, then spread green beans on prepared sheet and let dry.

3. Melt butter in now-empty pot over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms, garlic, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper and cook until mushrooms release moisture and liquid evaporates, about 6 minutes. Add flour and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Stir in broth and bring to simmer, stirring constantly. Add cream, reduce heat to medium, and simmer until sauce is thickened and reduced to 3½ cups, about 12 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

4. Add green beans to sauce and stir until evenly coated. Spread in even layer in 3-quart (or 13 by 9-inch) baking dish. Sprinkle with topping and bake until topping is golden brown and sauce is bubbling around edges, about 15 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes. Serve.