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Baked Orzo-Ortega Chile Casserole



Photo Susie Iventosch

1 cup sour cream (can use non-fat or low-fat sour cream)

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Directions

Preheat oven to 400F. In a large pot of boiling water, cook orzo to al dente. Drain and place in a large bowl. Mix cooked orzo with one 1 cup of the Jack cheese, red bell pepper, chillies and 1/2 cup of the sour cream. Stir well.

Spread into greased 9x13 inch baking dish. (You can certainly do individual ramekins, if you prefer.) Spread remaining sour cream in a thin, even layer on top and sprinkle with remaining Jack and Parmesan cheeses. Bake for approximately 20 minutes, or until slightly puffed and cheese is browned.

If there are any leftovers, which is unlikely, they make a terrific lunch to take to work or school, or it can be frozen for another busy day.

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Makes one 9x13 casserole

My friend Shawn made this dish for us before we ever had kids. Now, some 25 years later, it is still one of our family's favorite pasta dishes. My son used to think this dish was the absolute definition of the word "casserole." It wasn't until he was in his teens that he realized that "casserole" was a type of dish, not orzo pasta with chillies and cheese!

It can be made with brown or brown/wild rice, too, for those who prefer grains to pasta, but it is just a little more dense and slightly less puffy.

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups orzo (rice-shaped pasta) or rice

1 1/2 cups grated Monterey Jack cheese, or Pepper Jack (can use low-calorie version)

1/2 cup diced, mild Ortega chillies

1 red bell pepper, diced