

2004 COWBOY CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST

SERVES 12 (OR 8 COWBOYS)

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN START TO FINISH: 1½ HR

Sausage, egg, scallion, and cheese are layered over garlicky "Texas toast" in the heartiest take on savory bread pudding we've ever come across—just the sight of it could stir a cowboy-size appetite. This stick-to-your-ribs breakfast for a crowd can be completely assembled the night before.

½ stick (¼ cup) unsalted butter, softened, plus additional for greasing baking dish
1 (1-lb) package bulk breakfast sausage (not links)
1 (15-inch-long) loaf Italian bread (about 4 inches wide)
1 garlic clove, chopped
2 dozen large eggs
1 cup whole milk
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 large bunch scallions, chopped (1½ cups)
¼ lb sharp Cheddar, coarsely grated (1 cup)

- Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 375°F. Generously butter bottom and sides of a 13- by 9-inch baking dish.
- Cook sausage in a 12-inch heavy skillet over moderately high heat, stirring frequently and breaking up any large lumps with a fork, until browned, about 10 minutes. Pour off fat from skillet, then cool sausage to room temperature.
- Cut half of bread into 1-inch-thick slices and reserve remaining half for another use. Pulse butter (½ stick) and garlic in a food processor until smooth. Spread a thin layer of garlic butter on both sides of each bread slice, arranging bread in 1 layer in bottom of baking dish. Sprinkle sausage on top.
- Whisk together eggs, milk, salt, and pepper in a large bowl until frothy, then whisk in scallions and half of cheese. Pour egg mixture over sausage (bread will float to the top), pushing down on bread with a spatula to help it absorb liquid. Sprinkle with remaining cheese.
- Bake, tightly covered with a large sheet of buttered foil (buttered side down), 30 minutes, then carefully remove foil and bake until top is slightly puffed and custard is set in center, about 20 minutes more. Transfer baking dish to a rack and

let stand 10 minutes. Cut into 12 squares and serve immediately.

COOKS' NOTE: **Dish can be assembled (but not baked) 12 hours ahead and chilled, tightly covered with buttered foil. Bake as directed above.**

2005 CAESAR SALAD

SERVES 6

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

We've run recipes for this classic salad in various incarnations every few years as far back as the 1940s—with and without raw egg, with and without anchovies, changing up the cheese and even mixing in pasta or shellfish. This version is simply the best.

1 large garlic clove, halved lengthwise
¾ to 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 (3-oz) Portuguese roll or a 7-inch piece of baguette, cut into ¾-inch cubes
8 anchovy fillets packed in oil, drained
1 large egg
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
3 hearts of romaine (an 18-oz package), leaves separated but left whole
1 oz finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (½ cup; see Tips, this page)

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: a very large salad bowl (preferably wooden)

- Season salad bowl by rubbing a cut half of garlic followed by 1 teaspoon oil onto bottom and side of bowl (reserve garlic).
- Heat ¾ cup oil with both halves of reserved garlic in an 8-inch heavy skillet over moderately high heat, turning garlic occasionally, until golden, 1 to 2 minutes, then discard garlic. Add bread cubes to oil and fry, turning occasionally, until golden on all sides, about 2 minutes. Transfer croutons to paper towels to drain. Pour oil through a small fine-mesh sieve into a heatproof measuring cup and add enough additional olive oil to bring total to 6 tablespoons.
- Put anchovies in salad bowl and mash to a paste using 2 forks. Whisk in egg and lemon juice, then add reserved oil (warm or at room temperature) in a slow stream, whisking until emulsified. Season with salt to taste.
- Add romaine leaves to dressing and toss to coat. Add croutons and toss briefly.

Divide salad among 6 large plates, then sprinkle with cheese and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

COOKS' NOTES: The egg in this recipe is not cooked, which may be of concern if salmonella is a problem in your area.

- Dressing and tossing the lettuce leaves whole will result in an overall crispier salad.
- Although the croutons are best warm, they can be fried 1 hour ahead. ☀

TIPS: A GUIDE TO USING GOURMET'S RECIPES

- Measure liquids in glass or clear plastic liquid-measuring cups and dry ingredients in nesting dry-measuring cups (usually made of metal or plastic) that can be leveled off with a knife.
- Measure flour by spooning (not scooping) it into a dry-measuring cup and leveling off with a knife without tapping or shaking cup.
- Do not sift flour unless specified in recipe. If sifted flour is called for, sift flour before measuring. (Many brands say "presifted" on the label; disregard this.)
- When we call for a shallow baking pan, we mean an old-fashioned jelly-roll or four-sided cookie pan.
- Measure skillets and baking pans across the top, not across the bottom.
- To prepare a water bath for baking, put your filled pan in a larger pan and add enough boiling-hot water to reach halfway up the side of the smaller pan.
- Use light-colored metal pans for baking. If you use dark metal pans, including nonstick, your baked goods will likely brown more and the cooking times may be shorter.
- Wash and dry all produce before using.
- Before prepping fresh herbs or greens, remove the leaves or fronds from the stems—the exception is cilantro, which has tender stems.
- When salting water for cooking, use 1 to 2 tablespoons of salt for every 4 quarts of water.
- Black pepper is always freshly ground.
- Wear protective gloves when handling chiles.
- To zest citrus fruits, remove the colored part of the rind only (avoid the bitter white pith). For strips, use a vegetable peeler. For grated zest, we prefer using a rasplike Microplane zester, which results in fluffier zest, so pack to measure.
- Toast spices in a dry heavy skillet over moderate heat, stirring, until fragrant and a shade or two darker. Toast nuts in a shallow baking pan in a 350°F oven until golden, 5 to 10 minutes. Toast seeds either way.
- To finely grate Parmigiano-Reggiano and similar cheeses, use the small (½-inch) teardrop-shaped holes (not the ragged-edged holes) of a box or similar handheld grater. Other shaped holes, a Microplane rasp, and pregrated cheese yield different volumes. ☀