

One-Pan Beef Taco Bake

SERVES Serves 4 to 6

TIME 1 hour

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

Deconstructing the traditional taco and layering its components in a casserole dish seemed like a fun way to lighten that load. Beans are a favorite taco topping, so we combined the canned refried variety with spicy Ro-tel tomatoes and minced cilantro and spread the creamy mixture into our dish as the first layer. For a rich, cheesy layer, we sprinkled on Colby Jack cheese—a variety that promised even melting and minimal grease. To incorporate that classic taco shell crunch, we broke shells into pieces and scattered them over the cheese. For the meat, we opted for 90 percent lean ground beef, again to preempt any crunch-diminishing grease. Stirring chopped onion, garlic, chili powder, and oregano into the beef and microwaving the mixture kept the texture crumbly and bloomed the seasonings. We livened the beef layer by stirring in more Ro-tel tomatoes, cider vinegar for tang, and brown sugar for subtle sweetness. After adding the beef mixture to the dish, we topped it off with more cheese and shell pieces before baking. Finished with a sprinkling of fresh sliced scallions, this unique casserole delivered all the taco flavors we love, and cleanup was a snap.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound 90 percent lean ground beef
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 4 garlic cloves, minced

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- * If you can't find Ro-tel tomatoes, substitute one 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes, drained, and one 4-ounce can chopped green chiles, drained. Colby Jack cheese is also known as CoJack; if unavailable, substitute Monterey Jack cheese. Serve with your favorite taco toppings such as

- 2** tablespoons chili powder
- 1½** teaspoons minced fresh oregano or ½ teaspoon dried
- Salt and pepper
- 2** teaspoons apple cider vinegar
- 1** teaspoon packed brown sugar
- 2** (10-ounce) cans Ro-tel Diced Tomatoes & Green Chilies, drained
- 1** (16-ounce) can refried beans
- ¼ cup minced fresh cilantro
- 8** ounces Colby Jack cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- 12** taco shells, broken into 1-inch pieces (2 cups)
- 2** scallions, sliced thin

shredded lettuce, sour cream, salsa, and avocado.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Combine beef, onion, garlic, chili powder, oregano, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl and microwave, stirring occasionally and breaking up meat, until most of beef is cooked (some pink will remain), about 5 minutes. Stir in vinegar, sugar, and half of tomatoes.

2 Combine remaining tomatoes, refried beans, and cilantro in separate bowl, and spread evenly into 8-inch square baking dish. Sprinkle with ½ cup cheese and scatter 1 cup broken taco shells over top. Crumble beef mixture into dish and sprinkle with ½ cup cheese. Top with remaining 1 cup broken taco shells and remaining 1 cup cheese.

3 Bake until filling is bubbling and cheese is melted and spotty brown, about 25 minutes. Remove dish from oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with scallions and serve.