

Savory Bread Pudding with Bacon and Kale

1/2 pound challah or white mountain bread, cut into 1/2" cubes (about 1/2 - 3/4 loaf)
2 tablespoons butter
3 tablespoons maple syrup, divided
Kosher salt
1 bunch (about 10 oz.) kale, ribs removed and chopped into 1" pieces
5 slices bacon
1 cup sliced green onion, white and green parts
8 eggs
2 cups milk
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 teaspoon cider vinegar
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Arrange the bread cubes in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet and bake at 375 degrees until lightly toasted, 8-10 minutes. Let bread cool for a few minutes and then transfer to a large bowl. In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium low heat and continue cooking until the milk solids turn nutty brown. Remove from the heat and add 2 tablespoons of the maple syrup. Drizzle the mixture over the bread cubes, stirring as you drizzle. Sprinkle with a little salt and toss again.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the kale and start timing immediately. After 4 minutes, taste a leaf and if it is still tough and rubbery, cook another 1-2 minutes until tender. Drain and rinse then squeeze out excess moisture and fluff to separate the leaves.

In a medium skillet, cook the bacon until crisp and remove to a paper towel to drain. Pour off half of the bacon fat in the pan and then add the scallions to the skillet and cook until softened and beginning to brown, about 2 minutes. Add the kale and stir well to coat. Remove from heat.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, cream, remaining 1 tablespoon of maple syrup, vinegar, pepper and salt. In a greased 9"x13" pan, arrange half of the bread cubes in a single layer. Top with half of the bacon, half of the kale mixture and one third of the cheese. Repeat with the remaining bread, bacon and kale and another third of the cheese. Pour the egg mixture evenly over the top. Gently press with a spatula to allow the custard to coat everything. Top with the remaining cheese. Let sit for about 20 minutes (or up to 2 hours in the refrigerator) and gently press again. Bake at 375 degrees about 40-45 minutes, until set in the middle and golden. Let rest for a few minutes and then serve hot.