

Seasonal Eating
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.Chicken Divan Make a Divine Dinner
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Casseroles are a winter mainstay. They're hot and comforting. They make the house smell heavenly while they bake and all you need to add is some bread or fruit and you have a meal.

My mother and I would often go over to Cowan, Tennessee to wander the fun shops and then have lunch at a little restaurant called the Corner House. I always ordered the Chicken Divan, a casserole of chicken and broccoli smothered in a slightly tangy, cheesy sauce and topped with crispy crumbs. Yum – the divan was divine!

Chicken Divan was developed back in the 1930s or 40s at the Divan Parisian restaurant at the Chatham Hotel in New York City. It was a swanky, elegant dish of chicken served over broccoli with a sauce and crumbs on top. In the 1950s it was morphed a little into a casserole and became all the rage in home kitchens. It is still a favorite family friendly dish today.



The broccoli is essential in any chicken divan. You can use frozen, chopped broccoli but I prefer to use fresh broccoli cut into small florets and cooked just until tender in the microwave. It's easy and fresh. If you don't want to microwave, you could cook the broccoli with the onions and celery until crisp tender.

The chicken can be shredded or cubed. While I usually use shredded chicken in casseroles, I like the small bites of chopped chicken in this casserole that stand up to the broccoli. If you have leftover chicken from the night before, that will work just fine, or you can cook the chicken breasts and then chop them. Let them rest a few minutes before cutting so the juices settle back into the meat. Cooking the chicken in a whole piece and then chopping will also help keep it tender and juicy. If you do cook your chicken when making the casserole, leave all the drippings in the pan to sauté your onion and celery. They will pick up any flavor left behind. If you're using leftover chicken, just sauté the onion and celery in a little butter.

Some chicken divan recipes use mayonnaise, but the sour cream adds a slightly tangy flavor along with a little dry mustard powder. Use whatever cream soup you have on hand, chicken or mushroom or celery or even broccoli will work.

So, make a divine dinner for your family this month and whip up a casserole of Chicken Divan. For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at bedford.tennessee.edu.

Chicken Divan

2 tablespoons butter
2 medium boneless, skinless chicken breasts, pounded to about 1/2" thick
salt and black pepper
1/2 large onion, chopped
1 rib celery, chopped
3 cups small fresh broccoli florets
1 (10 1/2-ounce) can cream of chicken soup
2/3 cup sour cream
1/2 cup milk
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
2 1/2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese, divided
2 tablespoons melted butter
1 tube round buttery cracker, crushed

In a skillet, melt the butter and add the chicken breasts. Sprinkle with just a little salt and pepper. Cover and cook over medium heat about 4 minutes per side, until cooked through. Remove to a cutting board and let rest. Meanwhile, add the onion and celery to the skillet and cook over medium heat until tender and translucent, about 3 minutes. In a large bowl, stir together the chicken soup, sour cream, milk, garlic powder, onion powder and dry mustard. Add 1 1/2 cups of the cheese. Cook the broccoli in the microwave with a little water until just tender when poked with a fork, about 3-4 minutes. Drain the broccoli and add to the soup mixture. Cut the rested chicken into bite sized pieces and add to mixture (should be about 2-3 cups), stirring to combine. Place in a greased 9"x13" casserole dish. Top with the remaining cheese. Cover with foil and bake at 350 degrees for about 20 minutes or until bubbly. Stir together the melted butter and crushed crackers. Remove foil, sprinkle casserole with crumbs and bake another 5-10 minutes at 400 degrees, until crumbs are golden brown.