



SAVORY BREAD PUDDING

makes 4 to 6 servings

If you find yourself on a regular basis with stale bread on your hands, you'll appreciate this template. I love bread but we don't always finish a loaf before it gets hard, and I hate to throw out food. Not a problem: I make savory bread pudding, which is really a kind of gratin. The stale bread is soaked in milk, then layered or mixed with vegetables and baked in a custard. The savory bread pudding browns in the oven on the sides and the top, like any good gratin.

$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ pound stale or day-old bread

1 large garlic clove, cut in half

$1\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups milk (2 percent or whole), depending on how hard the bread is

Salt and freshly ground pepper 4 eggs

Vegetables and aromatics of your choice

2 to 3 ounces Gruyere cheese, shredded ($\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup), to taste

1 Prepare the bread: If the bread is still soft, slice it and toast it lightly. Rub all the slices, front and back, with the cut clove of garlic. If the bread is stale but not too hard to slice, slice it, don't bother toasting it, and rub the slices with garlic. Cut the sliced bread into cubes if desired. If the bread is too hard to cut safely, place the whole chunk in a bowl with 1 cup of the milk. Refrigerate for 1 hour or longer, turning the bread in the milk every once in a while. Break the bread up with your hands. Using a wooden spoon, whisk, or immersion blender, mash or beat the soaked

bread so that the mixture turns into a mush.

2 In a large bowl, beat together the milk (or remaining milk, if you soaked the bread) and eggs. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, a few twists of the pepper mill, and the bread, along with any milk remaining in the bowl. Toss together and let sit for 15 to 30 minutes.

3 Meanwhile, heat the oven to 350°F. Rub the sides of a 2-quart baking dish or gratin with the cut side of a garlic clove. Oil or butter the dish.

4 Stir the vegetables into the bread mixture along with the Gruyere (or arrange in the prepared dish according to the directions in the specific variation recipes that follow). Scrape the bread mixture into the prepared baking dish.

5 Bake until puffed and browned, 40 to 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and serve hot or warm.

ADVANCE PREPARATION: Bread puddings can be assembled hours before baking. They can also be baked ahead and reheated, but they will lose the puff.

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On May 9, Get Real About Food

FED UP