


Tim Walz's Tater Tot Hotdish

By Tim Carman

 Servings: 8-10 (makes about 12 cups)

 Active: 50 mins | Total: 1 hour 35 mins

- 1 pound ground turkey, preferably 85 to 93 percent lean
- 1 large egg
- 1 garlic clove, minced or finely grated
- 1/2 cup chopped scallions (4 to 6 scallions)
- 1 teaspoon fine salt, divided
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus more as needed
- 1/2 teaspoon dried ground sage
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- One (1-pound) package frozen cut green beans (no need to defrost; see Variations)
- 4 slices bacon (4 ounces)
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 1 1/2 cups (3 1/2 ounces) chopped cremini mushroom caps
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
- 2 1/2 cups whole or reduced-fat milk
- 1/2 cup half-and-half
- 1/4 cup chopped yellow or white onion
- 12 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded, divided (about 3 cups; see Notes)
- One (32-ounce) package Tater Tots (no need to defrost)

Step 1

In a medium bowl, mix together the turkey, egg, garlic, scallions, 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, the pepper and sage. In a large (12-inch) skillet over medium heat, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the turkey mixture and cook, stirring occasionally and breaking the meat up with a wooden spoon, until browned and no pink remains, 6 to 8 minutes. (While the turkey mixture is cooking, wash and dry the bowl you just used.) Transfer the turkey mixture to the now-clean bowl and add the green beans.

Step 2

Wipe out the skillet and return it to medium heat. Line a large plate with towels and set it near your work space. Add the bacon to the skillet and cook, turning over as needed, until crisp, 8 to 10 minutes. Adjust the heat as needed to prevent the bacon from burning. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to the prepared plate (leave the bacon grease in the skillet), let cool completely, then coarsely chop. Add the chopped bacon to the bowl with the turkey and green beans, and gently mix to combine. Transfer the mixture to a 9-by-13-by-2-inch baking dish and spread in an even layer.

Step 3

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees.

Step 4

While the bacon is cooling, return the skillet with the bacon grease to medium-high heat. Add 1 tablespoon of the butter and once it's melted and the foam begins to subside, add the mushrooms and cook, stirring frequently, until they release their liquid and it evaporates and the mushrooms brown, 4 to 6 minutes. Transfer the mushrooms to a small bowl.

Step 5

Return the skillet to medium heat. Add the remaining 4 tablespoons of butter and let it melt. Evenly sprinkle the flour into the butter and whisk to incorporate. Cook, stirring constantly, until the flour is cooked out and the roux is light brown, about 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in the milk and half-and-half, and cook, whisking constantly, until steam starts to rise off the surface of the mixture and it thickens to the consistency of heavy cream, 2 to 4 minutes. Add the cooked mushrooms, onion and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of salt, and season to taste with pepper. Cook, stirring, until well combined, about 1 minute. Add about 2 1/2 cups (10 ounces) of the cheese and cook, stirring constantly, until melted and the mixture is thick and uniform, about 1 minute, then remove from the heat.

Step 6

Pour the cheese mixture evenly over the turkey mixture in the baking dish. Arrange the Tater Tots over the top, then sprinkle with the remaining 1/2 cup (2 ounces) of cheese. Bake for about 45 minutes, or until golden brown and bubbling around the edges. Remove from the oven and let sit for about 10 minutes before serving.

Variations

If you prefer to blanch your own green beans instead of using frozen, bring a large pot of water to a boil, add the green beans and cook until crisp-tender and bright green, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain well, and transfer to a large bowl of ice water. Once cool, thoroughly drain and add to the turkey mix mixture.

Notes

Do not use pre-shredded cheese, as the cheese has anti-clumping additives that can yield a grainy result.

