

# Tennessee Onions

By **Melissa Knific**

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**Total Time** 1 hour 45 minutes

**Prep Time** 10 minutes

**Cook Time** 1 hour 20 minutes

**Rating** ★★★★★ (258)



Christopher Testani for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Simon Andrews.

The humble onion is the star ingredient in this simple Southern casserole — already sweet Vidalias are thinly sliced into rings and baked for over an hour, making them even sweeter. Sharp Cheddar, Swiss and Parmesan bring a salty richness to the three pounds of caramelized vegetables (much like their juxtaposition in [French onion soup](#) but with far less hands-on work). A mix of pantry spices creates a barbecue-inspired blend, but this lineup can be swapped with a number of seasonings, including [Cajun](#). While lemon is not traditional, an optional squeeze of juice can add a welcome acidity to the rich, sweet casserole. Despite its name, Tennessee onions are popular beyond the state's borders. Its origin is fuzzy, but some sources trace this thrifty dish as far back as the Great Depression. Serve Tennessee onions alongside [pork chops](#), at the [Thanksgiving table](#) or mounded on a burger.

## INGREDIENTS

**Yield:** 8 servings

- 2 teaspoons brown or granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme, or ½ teaspoon dried thyme, plus more for serving
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon mustard powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne
- Salt and black pepper
- 1 lemon, zested and halved (optional)
- 3 pounds Vidalia onions (3 to 5 onions, depending on size)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded sharp Cheddar
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Swiss cheese
- ⅓ cup (1 ounce) grated Parmesan
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

## PREPARATION

### Step 1

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Make the spice blend: In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, thyme, smoked paprika, garlic powder, mustard powder, cayenne pepper, 1 teaspoon kosher salt such as Diamond Crystal (or ¾ teaspoon fine salt), ¼ teaspoon black pepper and lemon zest, if using.

### Step 2

Slice onions crosswise into ¼-inch-thick rings. (Cut them very thinly, so you end up with silky onions, not crunchy ones.) Transfer them to a bowl, separating the rings into individual pieces. Gently toss with olive oil, the spice blend and the juice from one half of the lemon, if using, until coated.

### Step 3

Arrange half of the onions in the bottom of a 3-quart or 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Sprinkle with half of the Cheddar and half of the Swiss. Layer the remaining onions then cheeses, including the Parmesan, on top. Dot with the butter.

### Step 4

Cover the dish tightly with aluminum foil. Bake for 45 minutes (the casserole will be bubbling). Uncover, then bake until onions are soft and silky, and the casserole is golden brown in spots, about 30 minutes more.

### Step 5

Let cool for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with more thyme, then scoop onto plates and serve. If using the lemon, cut the remaining

lemon half into wedges for squeezing over the cheesy onions.

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