

*"However amazing a dish looks, it is always the taste that lingers in your memory. Family and friends will appreciate a meal that tastes superb – even if you've brought the pan to the table."*

– GORDON RAMSAY



## BITE by BITE

Conquering My Culinary  
Bucket List One Dish at a Time

By Emily Banks Wooten

*"No one who cooks, cooks alone. Even at her most solitary, a cook in the kitchen is surrounded by generations of cooks past, the advice and menus of cooks present, the wisdom of cookbook writers."*

– LAURIE COLWIN

# "Save the day" casserole

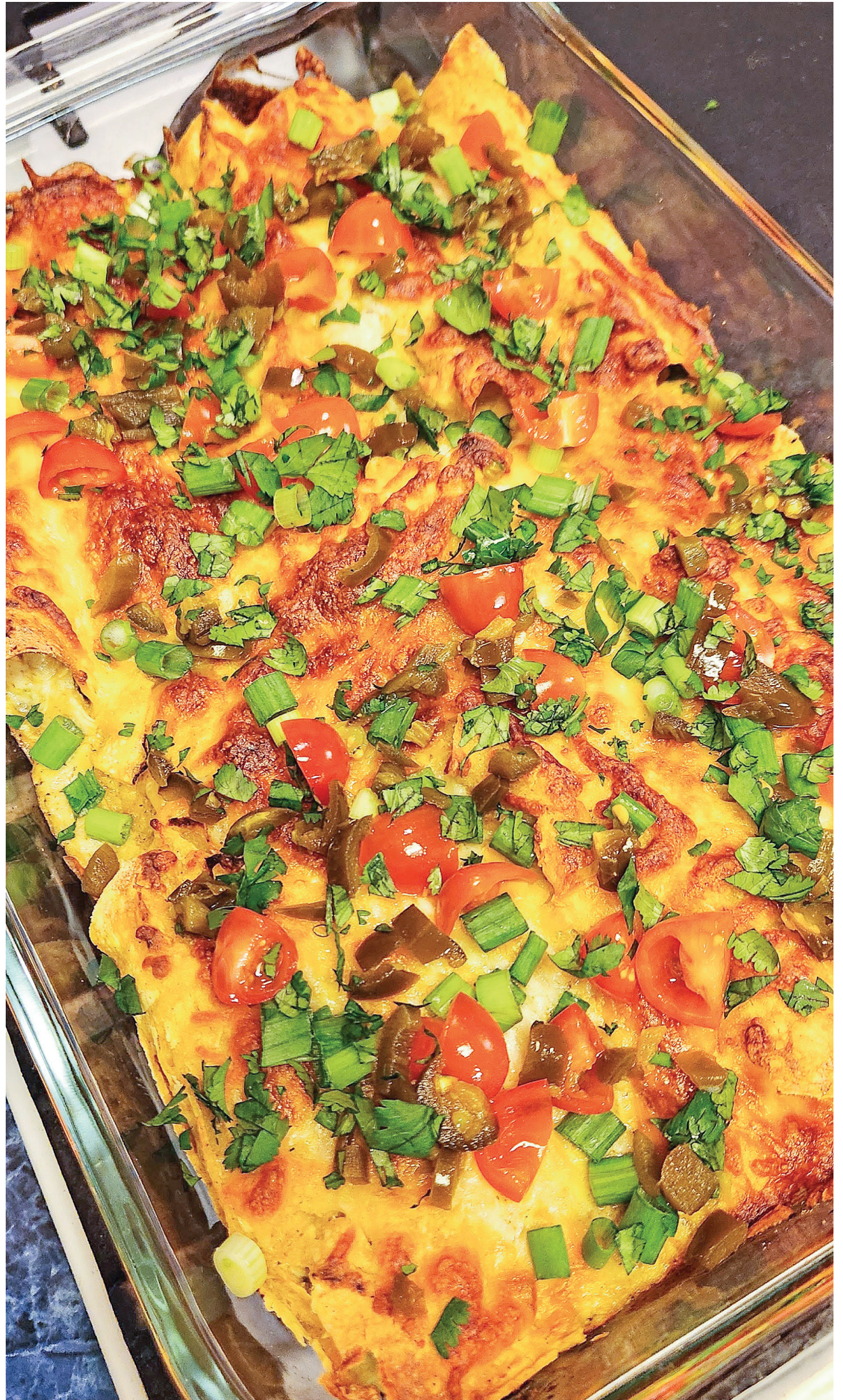
Casserole often get a bad rap and that's a shame. Sure, I love fine dining, pulling out the stops occasionally and making something fancy, but I also believe that it is a good idea – dare I say imperative – to have a number of tried and true casserole recipes in your arsenal. When it's been a busy work and school week and everyone's tired and perhaps a little cranky, it's wonderful to be able to quickly assemble something, throw it in the oven and know that you'll have a hot supper in roughly a half hour.

Daughter sometimes scoffs when she learns that supper is a casserole. But more often than not, she ends up liking it. Fortunately, that was the case not long ago when I served up a green chile chicken enchilada casserole. Over the years, I've made oodles of enchilada casseroles, rarely using the same recipe twice; not because I don't like them, but because there are so many from which to choose. I ran across this one recently and it was so easy that I think I could have made it with my eyes closed. Not that I would have tried to, but I still think that I could have.

And for goodness sake,

don't fret over the ingredients. Can't find green chile enchilada sauce? Pick up a jar of salsa verde or a jar of tomatillo sauce. Whatever you choose will be just fine. Having scheduled too many projects/meetings/appointments that particular day, I made a quick trip to HEB and then raced to the high school car-rider line. It was only as I got parked in the line and looked into my bag of groceries that I realized I had mistakenly picked up a 4 oz. can of chopped jalapeno peppers instead of a 4 oz. can of green chiles. Oh well. No biggie. Not sure of how hot they might be, I used half of them where I was supposed to use the green chiles and then used the other half as part of my toppings.

And that, my friends, is another reason to get on the casserole bandwagon. They are truly one of the most forgiving things you can put together and super easy to tailor to yours or your family's tastes. Don't like chopped cilantro, green onions and tomatoes? Then don't top it with that. Do you like sliced black olives and chopped avocados better? No problem. Top your casserole with that instead. You get the drift. This dish was quick and easy to prepare and it tasted wonderful. We all three enjoyed it. ■



## Green Chile Chicken Enchilada Casserole

From [jocooks.com](http://jocooks.com)

- 10 oz. chicken breast (cooked and shredded)
- 16 oz. green chile enchilada sauce
- 4 oz. can of green chiles, chopped
- 12 ounce Monterey Jack Cheese
- 1 cup sour cream
- 10 medium tortillas (I prefer corn tortillas for enchiladas.)
- 3 sprigs cilantro, chopped
- 3 green onions, chopped
- 1 medium tomato, chopped

- Preheat the oven to 425°.
- Mix the chicken with half of the green chile enchilada sauce, the green chiles and half of the Monterey Jack cheese.
- In another bowl, stir together the remaining enchilada sauce and the sour cream. Pour half of the sauce into a 9x13 baking dish.
- Take a tortilla, top with a couple of tablespoons of the chicken mixture, then roll it up and place over the sauce in the baking dish. Continue with all the tortillas until they are all filled and rolled.
- Pour the remaining sauce over the top of the tortillas, then sprinkle the remaining cheese evenly over the top.
- Place the dish in the oven and bake for 25 minutes. Top with chopped cilantro, green onions and tomatoes before serving.

## What to do about leftover wine?

Does your wine lose its flavor on the counter overnight? What do we do with wine left in the bottle at the end of the evening? Leftovers happen often to us who have partners who drink only white wine (DOW), while we are ROW, we drink only red. With an everyday problem like that, you'd think there would be an easy solution. Not so. With lots of solutions, even Consumer Reports (March 2024) added its two cents worth.

What is the problem? Wine in an opened bottle will go bad overnight. What happens? The easy answer is that it oxidizes. Oxygen in the air reacts with the wine and produces foul tasting things like hydrogen peroxide and quinone. If you have never tasted oxidated wine, try this: pour a little wine, maybe a quarter inch, in a glass at the end of the evening. Next morning, taste that wine ... it is a memorable experience you won't forget ... awesome has turned to awful!

So, what to do? Advice is easy to come by. If it's a screw top bottle, we screw on the top and put the wine in the refrigerator. Screw tops are good at keeping out oxygen and the cold refrigerator slows down oxidation. With a cork-top wine, stick the cork



back in if you can fit it. Personally, rather than fuss with corks, we put a rubber stopper in the bottle before we put it in the fridge. We use "Rabbit Wine Bottle Stoppers" from [rabbitwine.com](http://rabbitwine.com), four stoppers for \$10. Sure, we have a bit of oxygen left in the bottle, but we find the stoppers easy to use and the wine is still good for three or four nights of wine. Consumer Reports recommends stoppers called Repour Wine Savers, also \$10 for four. Their stoppers are made with iron and other ingredients to help soak up the oxygen; they claim the wine will keep for up to two months – we haven't tried this, but ...

Another suggestion is to pump the oxygen out of the bottle with a vacuum pump. We've tried this and didn't see that it made much difference ... then we lost our pump stoppers and got tired of it ... but try it for yourself. A friend who drinks pricier wine than we do pumps, and he says

the wine stays fresh for four days. An added benefit, he says, is that he drinks less because he doesn't worry about the pricey wine spoiling. We may have to try this again. Rabbit.wine offers a pump and stoppers for \$10.99, and Consumer Reports mentions Vacu Vin wine saver pump, available at Target for \$9.79 (on sale), \$24.97 from Amazon, and \$19.95 from Crate and Barrel.

At the extreme, the Coravin Wine Preservation System promises months to even years of wine preservation. The idea is to insert a needle into the wine and pump in Argon gas, forcing wine into your glass through another tube. This is a by-the-glass system that never lets oxygen into the bottle – you never remove the cork. The Argon gas apparently does not react with the wine. The system has a number of parts (Argon, et. al) that can be ordered separately. The Coravin website offers systems from \$249 to \$399, but Amazon.com offers the basic system for \$119. If you drink very high-ticket wines that you want to drink a little at a time and make sure they don't spoil, this might work for you. We have a fast-lane relative in Dallas who buys pricey wine and whose husband seldom drinks ... she swears by this. An-

other friend visited a wine shop in Paris (France, that is) and the Coravin was the only product they offered. Warning: Coravin won't work with screwtops.

And of course, we come back to an advantage of boxed wine – the box never lets oxygen in as you pour wine. My wife is quite happy with Bota Box Pinot Grigio which, over a month or two, we

have never had the wine oxidize.

Trying to preserve leftover wine is part of the fun of being a wine buff! Enjoying wine is a sociable hobby. People love to talk about it. Try different methods and remember our motto: De Gustibus non disputandum est – there is no accounting for taste! Send comments to [degustibus@livingston.net](mailto:degustibus@livingston.net).

