

Reprinted with permission from **Crazy for Casseroles** by James Villas. Published by Harvard Common Press, Boston, MA. New York, NY. Copyright 2003. All rights reserved.

Sunday Sausage, Apple, and Cheese Strata

Although I first had this strata when I was living in Missouri and being invited to lots of lavish weekend breakfasts and brunches in fine Midwestern style, it's a classic American concept that's as popular in Washington State as it is in New England and Georgia. Feel free to vary the styles of cheese, but, for heaven's sake, don't buy cheap, overly fatty sausage rolls for this casserole unless you want a greasy mess – even after frying and draining the meat. Fresh, lean sweet or hot Italian sausages (casings removed) can be substituted for standard breakfast sausage if you have any doubts about the quality of the packaged bulk style. The flavor of the casserole won't be the same, but its overall integrity will be better.

1 pound bulk pork sausage
4 slices white bread, crusts removed and cut into 1-inch cubes
2 medium-size apples (Granny Smith are ideal), peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch cubes
1/2 pound Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
2 cups milk
6 large eggs, beaten
1/4 teaspoon ground sage
Salt and black pepper to taste

1. In a large heavy skillet, break up the sausage, fry over moderate heat till thoroughly cooked, and drain on paper towels.
2. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 1-1/2 to 2-quart casserole.
3. Layer the bread cubes across the bottom of the prepared casserole. Scatter the sausage evenly over the bread, arrange the apples over the sausage, and sprinkle about three-quarters of the cheese over the apples.
4. In a large bowl, beat the milk, eggs, sage, and salt and pepper together till well blended, pour over the casserole, sprinkle the remaining cheese over the top, and bake till set and golden brown, about 30 minutes.

Makes 6 servings.