



## *Earthy spinach and nutty cheese star in this star of brunch*

**E**arthy spinach and nutty cheese star in this brunch-worthy strata. Ideally, this savory make-ahead bread pudding should be rich enough to satisfy without being overindulgent. And, since strata is such a great make-ahead dish, it should also be straightforward to put together. Unfortunately, too many recipes for strata are soggy and laden with excessive custard and filling ingredients.

Looking to create a go-to breakfast or brunch casserole, we first considered the bread. Whole dried bread slices had the best texture and appearance, and buttering them added richness. Spinach, shallot, and Gruyere complemented each other perfectly for the filling, and we sauteed the vegetables to remove excess moisture and prevent the casserole from becoming waterlogged. Weighting down the assembled strata overnight improved its texture; we found that two 1 pound boxes of brown or confectioners' sugar, laid side by side over the plastic wrap, made ideal weights. One hour is minimum, but you could do it overnight to bake the strata the following morning. The recipe can be doubled and assembled in a greased 13-by-9-inch baking dish; increase the baking time to 1 hour and 20 minutes. Substitute any semisoft melting cheese, such as Havarti, sharp cheddar, or Colby for the Gruyere.

### **BREAKFAST STRATA WITH SPINACH AND GRUYERE**

#### **Ingredients**

#### **Servings: 4-6**

Start to finish: 2 hours 15 minutes (plus 1 hour refrigeration time)

8-10 (1/2 inch-thick) slices French or Italian bread

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

4 shallots, minced

Salt and pepper

10 ounces frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

6 ounces Gruyere cheese, shredded (1 1/2 cups)

6 large eggs

1 3/4 cups half-and-half

#### **Preparation**

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 225 F. Arrange bread in single layer on rimmed baking sheet and bake until dry and crisp, about 40 minutes, flipping slices halfway through baking. Let bread cool slightly, then spread 2 tablespoons butter evenly over 1 side of bread slices.

Meanwhile, melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add shallots and pinch salt and cook until softened, about 3 minutes. Stir in spinach and

cook until warmed through, about 2 minutes; transfer to bowl.

Grease 8-inch square baking dish. Arrange half of bread slices, buttered side up, in single layer in dish. Sprinkle half of spinach mixture and 1/2 cup Gruyere over top. Repeat with remaining bread, remaining spinach mixture, and 1/2 cup Gruyere to make second layer.

Whisk eggs, 1 teaspoon salt, and pinch pepper together in bowl, then pour evenly over top of bread and cheese in dish. Cover dish tightly with plastic wrap, pressing it flush to surface. Weight down strata and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 F. Meanwhile, let strata sit at room temperature for 20 minutes. Unwrap strata and top with remaining 1/2 cup Gruyere. Bake until edges and center are puffed and edges have pulled away slightly from sides of dish, 50 to 55 minutes. Let casserole cool for 5 minutes before serving.

#### **Nutrition information per serving:**

547 calories; 276 calories from fat; 31 g fat (17 g saturated; 1 g trans fats); 292 mg cholesterol; 930 mg sodium; 40 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 8 g sugar; 24 g protein.