

Green Bean Casserole, with Extra Gravy

For the crispy onions:

½ onion, sliced thin
2 tbsp flour
1 egg, beaten well with 1 tbsp milk
1/3 cup Panko breadcrumbs
Salt
Oil

For the sauce:

2 tbsp butter
1 ½ cup sliced shiitake mushrooms
½ onion, sliced thin
1 garlic clove, sliced thin
2 tbsp flour
2 cups milk
½ chicken stock cube
Salt
Pepper
Onion powder
Garlic powder
Mushroom powder (optional)

For the beans:

1 lb green beans
Water
Salt



Green Bean Casserole was not a part of my childhood. I don't have the nostalgic memories of Aunt Evelyn bringing her famous dish to Thanksgiving and Christmas and every family feast day. I never understood it. Green beans and cream of mushroom soup? No, thank you, but no. My concept of the dish was basically that it was an excuse to eat a lot of crispy onions. But now that I'm older and ostensibly wiser, I think I had it wrong. Green bean casserole is an excuse to eat a lot of mushroom and onion gravy. It's not about the green beans at all. It's about the creamy and crispy and other delicious things surrounding the green beans. In my opinion, gravy is one of the great pleasures that makes life worth living. So, may I humbly present: Green Bean Casserole, with Extra Gravy.

Start by trimming both ends off your beans. Get your blanching water boiling and salt it until the water tastes like seawater. Boil the beans for about 3 minutes, then drain and let cool in a bowl large enough to hold the beans and gravy. Set aside.

Then, do the onions. Heat enough oil in a large pot to come up 1/3 of the way up the side of the pot. Heat over medium-high until the temperature reaches about 375degrees F, or a pinch of panko breadcrumbs dropped in the oil sizzles and turns brown after about a minute. In a medium bowl, toss the onions with the flour until well covered. Then, stir in the beaten egg and gently stir with a fork until the egg totally covers the onions. Add in your panko breadcrumbs and stir until evenly distributed. Not all the onions will be covered and not all the panko will be stuck to onions. This is okay. We're going to fry it all anyway. Once your oil is hot, carefully lower the breaded onions into the oil with a fork, tongs, or a metal frying spider. Gently move them around so that they aren't clumped. Fry until the onions are crispy and the breadcrumbs are browned. How long it takes will depend on the temp of the oil, but it's a forgiving recipe. When it's done, it's done, and it won't suffer for it taking longer or shorter.

For the sauce, melt the butter over medium-high heat until foaming. Add in the mushrooms, garlic, and onions. Let cook until colored, wilted, and fragrant, about 10 minutes, stirring frequently. The mushrooms will absorb the fat, and then start weeping it off as they brown. When your veg is ready, add in the flour and stir constantly until the flour is evenly coating the veg and browned slightly, about 3 minutes. You can add in a little extra butter if the pan looks too dry. When the flour is toasted, gradually add in your milk about ½ cup at a time, stirring constantly to prevent clumps. Add the stock cube and let it dissolve and combine in. Season to taste with onion and garlic powder, salt, and pepper. I happen to have dried oyster mushrooms that I blended into a powder, so I added a teaspoon or so, but you can easily skip it.

To assemble, mix ¾ of the gravy with the green beans. Ladle the green bean and gravy mix into a pie pan or other similarly sized vessel. Top with the remaining gravy, and then the crispy onions. Bake in a 400-degree oven until bubbly (if you're taking this to a destination, don't bake it until you get there), or about 15 minutes.

Serve hot, and possibly with spoons to make sure you get all the tasty, tasty gravy.