

Tuna Cassarole

You can use either tuna that has been canned in oil or in spring water. Drain the tuna and save the liquids for the bechamel (sauce).

1. Sauté the Mushrooms

- 12 tablespoons ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) butter + oil from tuna, if using tuna canned in oil
- 1 lb mushrooms

Thickly slice the mushrooms and sauté until lightly browned. Strain the mushrooms and put them in your casserole pan, saving drippings for the bechamel.

2. Make the Bechamel

- Drippings from cooking the mushrooms (if scant, add olive oil or melted butter to make $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups chicken or veggie broth + 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream + water from tuna, if using tuna canned in spring water
OR
5 cups of milk of some sort + water from tuna, if using tuna canned in spring water
- OPTIONAL: Minced garlic to taste

In a small mixing bowl combine the flour, salt, and pepper.

In a separate 2 qt or larger saucepan, heat the milk/broth/tuna water on a low heat to a near boil. This will speed up the process of thickening the bechamel. Be careful not to boil or scorch the milk.

The Roux

In a large heavy skillet (heavier skillets help prevent scorching the roux), add the drippings (and extra butter or olive oil if necessary) and heat until bubbly.

Whisk in the flour/salt/pepper. Continually stir/whisk this mixture until all the flour has been incorporated with the drippings. Initially the mixture will be similar to a streusel crumb topping, keep stirring it and if it remains crumbly, gradually add more olive oil or melted butter until mixture is more like a paste.

Continually stir the roux as you cook it for a few minutes (3-4 minutes is plenty).

Turn the heat off under the roux so that you don't have too much going on at once. Slowly pour half of the heated milk mixture into the roux and keep stirring until any clumps are smoothed out. It will be very thick.

Pour this thick sauce into the remaining heated milk in the large saucepan. Stirring continually, simmer over medium heat until the bechamel is thick and bubbly. You will know at this point how thick the bechamel will be, for the most part – you could cook it down a bit to thicken it, but for this casserole it isn't necessary unless the bechamel is way too thin.

If you end up with some lumps don't worry, you can pass the bechamel through a colander to work the lumps out.

3. Assemble the Casserole

- 1 lb. package of noodles of choice

Cook the noodles according to package instructions. Don't overcook them or you will end up with tuna mush instead of tuna casserole... which would still taste great, but be weird... You want the noodles to be at an al dente stage – tender, but firm to the bite.

While the noodles cook put the peas and tuna in a 9 x 13" casserole pan (or the equivalent).

- 1 - 10 oz. package of frozen peas (heat them if you are going to eat the casserole immediately)
- 2-4 cans of tuna, drained

Drain and place the noodles in your casserole pan with the peas and tuna. Pour the bechamel over them and gently stir until everything is coated with sauce. If your casserole is too dry, you can add a bit more milk and stir some more.

If you like, you can top the casserole with breadcrumbs and bake in a 325-degree oven until the crumbs are browned. If you do this, I recommend mixing an additional cup of milk into the casserole, even if your casserole is not overly dry. Baking it will cause the noodles to absorb the sauce quite a bit.