Cranberry-Orange Brioche French Toast Bake



Christmas Leftover Series

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Give leftover Christmas brioche or cranberry-orange bread a delicious second life with this warm, festive French toast bake. Buttery bread cubes soak overnight in a vanilla-orange custard, while tart cranberry sauce adds little bursts of fruity flavor throughout.
The top bakes into a beautiful golden layer with soft, custardy centers and lightly caramelized edges. Finished with an optional brown sugar streusel, this make-ahead breakfast casserole is perfect for a relaxed post-Christmas brunch without standing over the stove flipping individual slices.

Servings: 8
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Chilling Time: 1 hour minimum or overnight
Cook Time: 40–50 minutes
Total Time: Approximately 2 hours (including minimum chilling and resting time); overnight preparation requires less work in the morning
Equipment: 9×13-inch baking dish or 9×9-inch baking dish, mixing bowl, whisk, and small bowl for streusel

YOU'LL NEED

For the French Toast Bake

- 1 loaf (about 1 pound) brioche bread, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 cup whole-berry leftover cranberry sauce
- 1 tablespoon fresh orange zest (from approximately 1 large orange)
- 6 large eggs
- 2 cups whole milk
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt

For the Optional Streusel Topping

- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup packed light or dark brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

For Serving

- Powdered sugar, for dusting
- Warm maple syrup
- Extra cranberry sauce, optional

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO

1. Prepare the baking dish
Generously grease a 9×13-inch baking dish with butter. You can also use a 9×9-inch baking dish for a thicker casserole, but it may need additional baking time.
2. Layer the brioche and cranberry sauce
Spread half of the brioche cubes evenly in the prepared baking dish. Spoon half of the leftover cranberry sauce over the bread and sprinkle with half of the orange zest.
Repeat with the remaining brioche, cranberry sauce, and orange zest.
3. Make the orange-vanilla custard
In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, whole milk, granulated sugar, vanilla extract, cinnamon, and salt until thoroughly combined.
4. Pour and soak
Pour the custard evenly over the brioche cubes. Gently press the bread down with a spatula so the pieces absorb the liquid.
Cover the dish tightly and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, preferably overnight. This gives the brioche enough time to soak up the custard.
5. Prepare the streusel topping
When ready to bake, preheat the oven to 375°F.
In a small bowl, combine the flour and brown sugar. Add the cold butter and rub it into the dry ingredients with your fingertips or a pastry cutter until coarse crumbs form.
Remove the casserole from the refrigerator, uncover it, and sprinkle the streusel evenly over the top.
6. Bake until golden and set
Bake uncovered at 375°F for approximately 40-50 minutes in a 9×13-inch dish. A deeper 9×9-inch casserole may require additional time.
The top should look golden and lightly crisp, and the center should be set rather than liquid. Check the center with a food thermometer; the egg mixture should reach 160°F. If the top browns too quickly, loosely cover it with foil for the remaining baking time.
7. Rest and serve
Remove from the oven and let the casserole rest for about 10 minutes. Dust lightly with powdered sugar and serve warm with maple syrup or extra cranberry sauce.

Why This Recipe Works for Post-Holiday Brunch

Brioche is naturally rich in butter and eggs, making it ideal for soaking up a creamy custard. Slightly stale bread works especially well because it absorbs the liquid without becoming overly soggy.
The combination of sweet brioche, tart cranberry sauce, fresh orange zest, and warm cinnamon creates a festive breakfast that feels special but requires very little morning preparation.

Flavor Profile, Pairings & Kitchen Notes

Flavor and texture: Buttery brioche creates a soft, custardy center with golden edges. Tart cranberries balance the sweetness, while fresh orange zest adds a bright citrus fragrance.
What to serve with it: Pair with crispy bacon or breakfast sausage for a savory contrast. Fresh orange slices, berries, and hot coffee also make lovely brunch additions.

Easy substitutions:

- Use leftover panettone or challah instead of brioche.
- Use leftover homemade or canned whole-berry cranberry sauce.
- If using fresh cranberries, toss 1½ cups with 2 tablespoons of sugar before layering. They will remain tart and juicy after baking.
- Replace orange zest with lemon zest for a different citrus flavor.
- Use half-and-half instead of whole milk for a richer custard.

Make-ahead tip: Assemble the casserole, pour over the custard, cover, and refrigerate overnight. Prepare the streusel separately and add it just before baking so it stays crumbly.

Storage and reheating: Refrigerate leftovers in a covered container within 2 hours of baking and use within 3–4 days. Reheat individual portions in the microwave or warm larger portions in a 325°F oven until heated through to 165°F.

Cook's Confidence Cue: Slightly stale brioche is best for this recipe. If your bread is very fresh, spread the cubes on a baking sheet and dry them in a 300°F oven for approximately 10–15 minutes. Let them cool before assembling. This helps prevent a soggy casserole.