

- Prep Time: 20 minutes
- Bake Time: 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes
- Resting Time: 10 minutes
- Total Active & Passive Time: ~1 hour 45 minutes
- Yield: 6 to 8 generous servings (Standard 9×5-inch loaf pan)
- Cooking Intensity Level: Medium (Requires careful temperature management, meat blending, and glaze reduction)

Table of Contents

- ✦
- Heat & Cooking Intensity Guide
- Ingredients
 - 1. For the Meatloaf Mixture:
 - 2. For the Tangy Tomato Glaze:
- Step-by-Step Cooking Instructions
 - Step 1: Prep the Oven & Baking Pan
 - Step 2: Soften the Aromatics & Soak the Crackers
 - Step 3: Combine the Meatloaf Mixture
 - Step 4: Shape and Transfer to Pan
 - Step 5: Mix and Apply the Glaze
 - Step 6: Bake to Perfection
 - Step 7: Rest and Slice
- Chef's Pro-Tips for Success
- Complete Nutritional Information

Heat & Cooking Intensity Guide

Achieving a moist, flavorful meatloaf that slices cleanly without crumbling relies on controlling the cooking intensity at each stage:

- **Mixing Intensity (Ambient Temperature):** Gentle handling is vital when combining the meats. Over-mixing compresses the proteins, leading to a tough, dense meatloaf rather than a tender, melt-in-your-mouth crumb.
- **Baking Intensity (Moderate Heat – 350°F / 175°C):** A steady moderate oven temperature ensures the exterior browns and caramelizes nicely while the thick center cooks through gently without drying out the ground beef and pork.
- **Glazing Intensity (Final 15 Minutes):** Applying the tangy tomato glaze midway through baking allows the sugars in the ketchup and brown sugar to thicken, bubble, and caramelize into a glossy, savory crust.

Ingredients

1. For the Meatloaf Mixture:

- **Ground Beef:** 1.5 lbs (680g) — *80/20 chuck blend is recommended for optimal moisture and richness*
- **Ground Pork:** 0.5 lbs (225g) — *adds classic Southern flavor and tenderness*
- **Buttery Crackers:** 1 cup finely crushed crackers (about 25 standard Ritz crackers) — *acts as the ultimate binder and moisture retainer*
- **Whole Milk:** 1/2 cup (120ml)
- **Large Eggs:** 2, lightly beaten
- **Yellow Onion:** 1/2 cup, finely diced
- **Green Bell Pepper:** 1/2 cup, finely diced (*essential for authentic Southern flavor profile*)
- **Sharp Cheddar Cheese:** 1 cup (100g), freshly shredded — *melts into the loaf for savory pockets of flavor*
- **Worcestershire Sauce:** 1 tablespoon

- Garlic Powder: 1 teaspoon
- Salt: 1 1/2 teaspoons
- Black Pepper: 1/2 teaspoon

2. For the Tangy Tomato Glaze:

- Ketchup: 3/4 cup
- Light Brown Sugar: 2 tablespoons, packed
- Apple Cider Vinegar: 1 tablespoon (adds brightness to cut through the rich meat)
- Prepared Yellow Mustard: 1 teaspoon
- Smoked Paprika: 1/2 teaspoon

Step-by-Step Cooking Instructions

Step 1: Prep the Oven & Baking Pan

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C).
2. Lightly grease a standard 9×5-inch loaf pan with non-stick cooking spray or vegetable oil.
3. *Optional variation:* If you prefer a crusty exterior all the way around, line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and shape the meat mixture into a free-form loaf directly on the pan.

Step 2: Soften the Aromatics & Soak the Crackers

1. In a small bowl, combine the crushed buttery crackers and the 1/2 cup of whole milk. Stir well and let it sit for 3 to 5 minutes so the crackers absorb the milk completely, forming a soft paste (panade).
2. Finely dice your yellow onion and green bell pepper. *(For an ultra-smooth texture favored by some, you can sauté them in a skillet for 4 minutes until translucent, though raw finely diced vegetables will soften during baking).*

Step 3: Combine the Meatloaf Mixture

1. In a very large mixing bowl, add the ground beef and ground pork.
2. Add the soaked cracker-milk mixture, beaten eggs, diced onion, diced green bell pepper, shredded sharp cheddar cheese, Worcestershire sauce, garlic powder, salt, and black pepper.
3. Using your hands or a spatula, gently fold and mix the ingredients together just until thoroughly combined. Do not overmix, as working the meat too aggressively will make the cooked meatloaf dense and tough.

Step 4: Shape and Transfer to Pan

1. Transfer the meat mixture into your prepared 9×5-inch loaf pan.
2. Press the mixture down gently into the corners to eliminate any air pockets, smoothing the top into an even surface.

Step 5: Mix and Apply the Glaze

1. In a small bowl, whisk together the ketchup, light brown sugar, apple cider vinegar, yellow mustard, and smoked paprika until smooth.

2. Pour about two-thirds of this glaze evenly over the top of the unbaked meatloaf, spreading it with a spoon or brush. Save the remaining one-third for serving or for a final post-bake brush.

Step 6: Bake to Perfection

1. Place the loaf pan in the preheated oven on the center rack.
2. Bake uncovered for 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes.
3. For food safety and precision, check the internal temperature with an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest center of the loaf; it should read 160°F (71°C).
4. If the top glaze starts darkening too quickly during the last 20 minutes, loosely tent a sheet of aluminum foil over the pan.

Step 7: Rest and Slice

1. Remove the meatloaf from the oven and transfer the pan to a wire cooling rack.
2. Crucial Step: Let the meatloaf rest undisturbed in the pan for 10 to 15 minutes before slicing. Resting allows the internal juices to redistribute throughout the meat; slicing immediately will cause the loaf to crumble apart.
3. Slice into thick portions, spoon any remaining glaze over the top, and serve hot.

Chef's Pro-Tips for Success

- Choose the Right Meat Ratio: Avoid ultra-lean ground beef (like 96/4). The fat content in an 80/20 beef-and-pork blend melts during baking, ensuring the meatloaf remains juicy and tender.
- The Magic Panade: Using milk-soaked crackers instead of dry breadcrumbs is the secret weapon of traditional Southern cooks. It traps moisture inside the protein matrix,

preventing dryness.

- Freezer-Friendly Meal Prep: You can shape the unbaked meatloaf in a foil-lined loaf pan, wrap it tightly, and freeze it raw for up to 3 months. Thaw completely in the refrigerator before baking, adding 10–15 minutes to the total bake time.

Complete Nutritional Information

(Calculated per serving based on 8 equal portions)

Nutrient	Amount per Serving	% Daily Value*
Calories	385 kcal	—
Total Fat	24.5g	31%
Saturated Fat	10.5g	53%
Trans Fat	0.8g	—
Cholesterol	115mg	38%
Sodium	680mg	30%
Total Carbohydrates	16g	6%
Dietary Fiber	1.0g	4%
Total Sugars	9.0g	—
<i>(Includes Added Sugars)</i>	<i>(6.0g)</i>	<i>(12%)</i>
Protein	23.5g	47%
Vitamin D	0.5mcg	3%
Calcium	95mg	7%
Iron	2.6mg	14%
Potassium	340mg	7%