

Mac & Cheese

By Audrey Plant

Ingredients

2 pounds (32-ounces) medium shells pasta, 2 boxes

Cheese Sauce

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter
6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
4 cups whole milk
2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
2 cups mild cheddar cheese, shredded
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon mustard powder
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Topping

1 cup Gruyère cheese, shredded
1 cup mild cheddar, shredded
2 cups panko breadcrumbs
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon kosher salt

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 375 F and fill a large pot with water, bring to boil on the stovetop.
2. Add uncooked pasta to boiling salted water, cook to the lowest minute cook time on the package. Remove heat and drain pasta.
3. Using a large skillet preheat to medium-low heat. Melt butter completely and add flour. Whisking vigorously, until a thick light brown roux is formed, about 1 to 2 minutes.
4. While whisking, slowly pour milk into the skillet. A thick cream sauce will be formed. Add shredded cheese and whisk in until smooth and thick. Add pepper, salt, mustard powder, and cayenne pepper. The sauce should coat the back of a spoon. Remove from heat.
5. In a large mixing bowl, add cooked pasta shells and pour cheese sauce over pasta. Mix until well combined.

6. Pour pasta and cheese mixture into a large baking dish. Set aside.
7. Sprinkle Gruyère cheese and remaining mild cheddar over the top of pasta in the baking dish.
8. Using a small bowl, add breadcrumbs, olive oil, black pepper, and salt.
9. Sprinkle breadcrumb mixture over top of the mac and cheese. Place baking dish on a sheet pan. Place in oven and bake for 15-20 minutes or until top is golden brown.
10. Remove mac and cheese and serve immediately.

Notes:

1. It's very important to keep control of the heat when making the cheese sauce. You do not want to bring it to a boil. While cooking the sauce, the heat should be at medium-low heat to avoid it from curdling.
2. Creating a béchamel takes some patience, do not rush the process with heat. Allowing each part of the sauce to be incorporated makes for a cohesive creamy sauce.
3. If you plan on serving the mac and cheese later, follow the recipe to step #6. When ready to bake, add 1 cup of whole milk over top and stir until combine. Resume the remainder of the recipe as follows.
4. Substitute macaroni for shells if you prefer that shape of pasta.
5. I prefer shells because it holds the sauce better.
6. Cooking the mac and cheese on a sheet pan prevents any spillage over the baking dish.