

Creamy Homemade Baked Mac and Cheese

This baked mac and cheese is a family favorite recipe, loved by children and adults.

Prep Time	Cook Time	Total Time
20 mins	15 mins	35 mins



★★★★★
4.88 from 3663 votes

Course: Main Course, Side Dish Cuisine: American
Keyword: mac and cheese, macaroni and cheese Servings: 8 - 10 servings
Calories: 665kcal Author: The Chunky Chef

Ingredients

- 1 lb. dried elbow pasta
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup all purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups whole milk
- 2 1/2 cups half and half **see chef tips #1 below**
- 4 cups shredded medium cheddar cheese divided (measured after shredding)
- 2 cups shredded Gruyere cheese divided (measured after shredding)
- 1/2 Tbsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1/4 tsp. paprika smoked paprika is our favorite!

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F and grease a 3 qt baking dish (9x13"). Set aside.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. When boiling, add dried pasta and cook 1 minute less than the package directs for al dente. Drain and drizzle with a little bit of olive oil to keep from sticking.
3. While water is coming up to a boil, shred cheeses and toss together to mix, then divide into three piles. Approximately 3 cups for the sauce, 1 1/2 cups for the inner layer, and 1 1/2 cups for the topping.
4. Melt butter in a large saucepan over MED heat. Sprinkle in flour and whisk to combine. Mixture will look like very wet sand. Cook for approximately 1 minute, whisking often. Slowly pour in about 2 cups or so of the half and half, while whisking constantly, until smooth. Slowly pour in the remaining half and half plus the whole milk, while whisking constantly, until combined and smooth.
5. Continue to heat over MED heat, whisking very often, until thickened to a very thick consistency. It should almost be the consistency of a semi thinned out condensed soup.
6. Remove from the heat and stir in spices and 1 1/2 cups of the cheeses, stirring to melt and combine. Stir in another 1 1/2 cups of cheese, and stir until completely melted and smooth.
7. In a large mixing bowl, combine drained pasta with cheese sauce, stirring to combine fully. Pour half of the pasta mixture into the prepared baking dish. Top with 1 1/2 cups of shredded cheeses, then top that with the remaining pasta mixture.
8. Sprinkle the top with the last 1 1/2 cups of cheese and bake for 15 minutes, until cheesy is bubbly and lightly golden brown.

Notes

1. Half and half is a common dairy product in the US - <https://www.thekitchn.com/what-is-halfandhalf-ingredient-intelligence-205959>
2. Please feel free to add additional seasonings per your tastes, this is a base recipe that you can change up to make your own. Garlic powder, onion powder, ground mustard, smoked paprika, and hot sauce are some favorites of ours to add.
3. To get the 4 cups of cheddar, use a 16 oz block of cheddar and shred.
4. To get the 2 cups of gruyere, use as close to an 8 oz block of gruyere as you can (different brands have different sized blocks), and shred.
5. This recipe wasn't designed to be cooked in a slow cooker, but I do know some readers have kept it warm in one after being baked. If you're looking for a mac and cheese recipe that's meant to be cooked in a slow cooker, I have one for you <https://www.thechunkychef.com/ultra-creamy-crockpot-mac-and-cheese/>

Mac and Cheese can be made ahead:

- Make as directed (but do not bake), transfer to baking dish and cool completely. Cover tightly with foil and refrigerate 1-2 days ahead.
- Before baking, let dish sit on counter for 30 minutes.
- Bake at recipe temperature for 25-35 minutes, until hot and bubbly.

Freezing

- I haven't tested freezing this recipe, but my advice (based on many reader's feedback) would be to make the mac and cheese (but don't bake it), then let it cool completely. Cover the dish tightly with several layers of foil and freeze. Thaw completely in the refrigerator (the exact amount of time will depend on the dish you're using, how cold your refrigerator is, etc). Let the dish sit at room temperature for about 30 minutes, then preheat the oven. Bake as directed, but you'll need to add at least 10-15 minutes of extra cooking time since the dish will still be chilled.

FIVE CHEESE VARIATION:

Replace cheese amounts with the following:

- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 cup Colby cheese, shredded
- 1 cup Muenster cheese, shredded
- 1 1/2 cups Gruyere cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded

FOR A CRUNCHIER TOPPING AND FIRMER CONSISTENCY:

- Prepare recipe as directed but bake at 350 or 375 F degrees for 20-30 minutes. Broil at the end of baking for approximately 2-5 minutes, until golden brown and crunchy.