Buffalo Chicken Mac & Cheese

https://youtu.be/zF9fUNq8yQc

For 8 to 10 servings

Ingredients

3 cooked and shredded chicken breasts (4 to 5 cups)

16 oz. (454 g) dry macaroni

2 tbsp (28 g) unsalted butter

2 tbsp (16 g) all- purpose flour

1 1/2 cups (375 ml) milk

8 oz. (226 g) cream cheese

2 cups (226 g) shredded mild cheddar cheese

1/4 tsp garlic powder

1/8 tsp cayenne pepper (add more if you like it really spicy)

1/8 tsp black pepper

Dash of salt to taste

3/4 cup (188 ml) Buffalo wing hot sauce

Baked Version

Unsalted Butter (to grease dish)

¼ cup (63 ml) Buffalo wing hot sauce

1 cup (113 g) shredded mild cheddar cheese

Prep Work

Add enough water to a saucepot to cover 3 boneless chicken breasts. Bring to a boil over high heat. Turn to low and gently simmer, covered, for 15 minutes or until the chicken has an internal temperature of at least 165°F (74°C). Rotisserie chicken or canned chicken can also be used.

The macaroni can be cooked per the manufacturer's instructions. Strain and put it to the side when completely cooked.

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To Make the Sauce

Add the butter to a saucepan over medium to high heat and melt it down. Sprinkle on the flour while stirring frequently and cook over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes.

Pour the milk into the pan. Whisk over medium heat until it becomes thick and coats the back of a spoon. Then turn the heat to low.

Add the cream cheese in batches (room temperature cream cheese works best) and stir well. Once the cream cheese is fully melted, add 2 cups (226 g) cheddar cheese, and mix well. When the cheese is well combined, add the garlic powder, cayenne pepper, black pepper, salt, and $^{3}/_{4}$ cup (188 ml) Buffalo wing sauce. Mix well.

Assembling the Mac & Cheese

Add the shredded chicken to the cheese sauce and stir over low heat. Mix in the cooked macaroni in batches. Stir well for a few minutes until all the ingredients are warmed up.

It can be eaten on the spot or baked in the oven.

To Bake the Mac & Cheese

Butter a baking dish (4-quart or 3.8 liter) casserole dish. Add the mac & cheese. Drizzle Buffalo wing sauce over the top. Top with an additional shredded cheddar cheese.

Cook, uncovered, in a pre-heated oven at 350°F (176°C) for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown on top.

Tips & Substitutions

Monterey Jack, Colby Jack, mozzarella, or pepper jack cheese can be substituted for part of the cheddar cheese to change up the flavor and texture. Pepper jack is especially good if you want more heat.

To add a crunchy topping, sprinkle buttered breadcrumbs or crushed crackers over the top before baking. It adds great texture and helps create a golden crust.

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Cream cheese works best at room temperature because it melts more smoothly into the sauce and helps prevent lumps.

Cavatappi, shells, penne, or rotini can be used instead of macaroni. Pasta shapes with ridges or curves hold onto the sauce especially well.

If the sauce becomes too thick after baking, stir in a little warm milk before serving to loosen it back up.

Blue cheese crumbles can be added on top after baking for a classic Buffalo chicken flavor combination.

For a smoky flavor, add a small pinch of smoked paprika or use smoked cheddar cheese in the sauce.

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