

Bacon Mac & Cheese

THE SAUCE AND GRAVY



CHANNEL



<https://youtu.be/PJ6xelIeVRo>

For 6 to 8 servings

Ingredients

4 cups or 1L milk

Handful fresh thyme sprigs

2 garlic cloves

16 oz. or 454g dry macaroni

1/2 lb. or 250g bacon chopped

6 tbsp or 90ml bacon grease

Unsalted butter (as needed)

6 tbsp or 48g all-purpose flour

1/2 tsp red pepper flakes

1 tsp black pepper

1 tsp salt

1 cup or 250ml heavy cream

4 cups or 452g shredded mild cheddar cheese

Baked Version

1/2 cup or 57g shredded mild cheddar cheese

Prep Work

Pour the milk into a saucepot and add the thyme sprigs. Smash the garlic and add it to the pot. Turn the heat to medium and gently warm the milk until it starts to let off steam. Take the pot off heat and set it to the side to cool.

Cook the macaroni per the manufacturer's instructions. While the macaroni cooks, start working on the sauce.

To Make the Sauce

Add the bacon to a large saucepan. Turn the heat on medium to high and completely brown and cook the bacon. Remove the bacon from the pan and put it to the side. Keep the bacon grease in the saucepan.

You will need 6 tbsp (60g) of fat. If the bacon doesn't render enough fat, substitute with unsalted butter. Warm the bacon grease (melt any butter used). Sprinkle the flour onto the hot grease and whisk it well. Cook over low to medium heat for 2 to 5 minutes frequently mixing.

Pour the milk that was previously warmed through a fine sieve into the saucepan with the fat/flour mixture (roux). The milk should not be piping hot. It should be roughly room temperature or cooler. This will help to keep lumps from forming in the sauce. Whisk well over medium heat. Once the flour mixture is well incorporated into the milk, add the red pepper flakes, black pepper, salt, and heavy cream. Stir and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Once thick, remove the pan from the heat.

Mix 4 cups (452g) of room temperature shredded cheddar cheese to the sauce in batches. Stir until well-combined.

Taste the sauce to see if you need to adjust the seasoning.

Assembling the Mac & Cheese

Drain the cooked macaroni and place it into a large bowl. Pour half of the cheese sauce and add half of the bacon into the bowl and mix. Then add the rest of the cheese sauce and bacon and stir until well combined.

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

To Bake the Mac & Cheese

Pre-heat the oven at 425°F (218°C). Add the mac & cheese to a 9x13 inch (23x33cm) greased baking dish. Sprinkle 1/2 cup (57g) shredded cheddar cheese on the top.

Cook, uncovered, for 20 minutes or until bubbly and golden brown on top.

Tips & Substitutions

Fresh thyme and garlic gently infused into the milk give this mac and cheese a deeper homemade flavor. If you are short on time, you can skip the infusion step, but it adds a subtle richness that makes the sauce taste more complex.

If the bacon does not produce enough grease, unsalted butter is a perfect substitute and still creates a rich roux for the sauce.

For extra smoky flavor, try using smoked cheddar cheese or thick-cut smoked bacon. A small pinch of smoked paprika also works nicely in the sauce.

Cavatappi, shells, rotini, or penne can be substituted for macaroni. Pasta with curves and ridges tends to hold the cheese sauce better.

For an even creamier texture, add a few ounces of cream cheese or an extra splash of heavy cream to the sauce.

To create a crunchy baked topping, sprinkle buttered breadcrumbs, crushed Ritz crackers, or panko breadcrumbs over the top before baking.

This recipe can easily be turned into a full meal by mixing in shredded chicken, sautéed mushrooms, or steamed broccoli before baking.

If the mac and cheese thickens too much after sitting, stir in a little warm milk over low heat to loosen the sauce back up.