

Homemade Baked Mac n' Cheese

Servings: 4

Ingredients:

2 ½ cups uncooked pasta (any type you like)
7 tablespoons butter (split)
4 tablespoons flour
3 1/2 cups milk and/or heavy cream mix (heavy cream will give you a smoother texture, but milk will also work, or you can mix the two)
2/3 cup American cheese (cut into small pieces)
1 1/3 cup shredded Sharp Cheddar (split)
1 cup Panko bread crumbs
1 ½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon pepper
1 ½ teaspoon ground mustard
1 tablespoon minced parsley
Garlic powder (optional)

Directions:

1. Begin by boiling 2 quarts of salted water. When water is at a full boil, add pasta to the water. Cook pasta for 5 minutes, or until halfway cooked and still quite firm (will continue cooking in baking process). Drain, and run under cold water to stop the cooking process.
2. Melt 4 tablespoons of butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. When butter is completely melted add in the flour. Stir mixture continuously for 1-2 minutes until it becomes a blonde color and the raw flour flavor is cooked out.
3. Add the 3 1/2 cups of milk/heavy cream to the saucepan. Continue stirring for 2-3 minutes until sauce begins to thicken. Turn down the heat if the mixture is becoming too dark or too thick.
4. Turn down the heat to low and add in the American cheese and half of the shredded cheddar. Continue stirring until the cheese is melted. Then turn off the heat. You may need to add more milk/cream if the sauce has become too thick. You want it to be a smooth and flowing sauce. It will thicken more when the pasta is added.
5. Then add your salt, pepper, and ground mustard to the sauce. Taste the sauce and adjust the seasonings to your liking.
6. Add the pasta to your sauce mixture. Mix until completely incorporated.

7. Heat a sauté pan over medium heat. Add the remaining butter to the pan. Once completely melted. Turn off the heat. Add the panko breadcrumbs and parsley to the pan and stir to evenly coat the mixture.
8. In a 2-3 quart baking dish, spray the pan well with cooking spray. Then fill the dish with the noodle and sauce mixture and spread evenly. Top the dish with the breadcrumbs along with the remaining cheese.
9. Bake at 350° F for 15-20 minutes until top is golden brown and cheese begins to bubble.