FREE RECIPE CARD NO. 020

KOOK'S PROPER MACARONI CHEESE

Tender macaroni in silky cheddar béchamel with a crisp golden crumb.



⏱️ QUICK INFO

- • Serves: 6
- • Prep: 15 minutes
- • Pasta + sauce: 20 minutes
- • Bake: 15–20 minutes
- • Rest: 10 minutes
- • Total: About 1 hour
- • Oven: 220°C / 200°C fan

🍏 INGREDIENTS

🍝 MACARONI
• 400 g dried elbow macaroni
• Salt for the cooking water
🥣 CHEDDAR BÉCHAMEL
• 70 g butter + 70 g plain flour
• 1 litre full-cream milk, warmed
• 2 tsp Dijon mustard
• ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
• 250 g tasty cheddar, grated + divided
• Black pepper + salt if needed
✨ GOLDEN CRUMB
• 60 g breadcrumbs or panko
• 20 g butter, melted

METHOD

1. Undercook the macaroni
Boil 2 minutes short of packet time; drain without rinsing.

2. Cook the roux
Melt butter, stir in flour and cook gently for 2 minutes.

3. Build the béchamel
Whisk in warm milk gradually; simmer until smooth and pourable.

4. Add cheese off the heat
Stir in Dijon, nutmeg and 200 g cheddar; fold through pasta.

5. Top, bake + rest
Add remaining cheese and buttered crumbs. Bake golden; rest 10 minutes.

🪶 FROM RAFFALD'S TABLE TO OURS

In 1769, English cook Elizabeth Raffald dressed tender macaroni with cream, butter and flour, then covered it with toasted Parmesan. Our béchamel version is richer and more familiar, but the idea is unchanged: coat the pasta generously and finish it golden.

kooks secrets

🔥 KOOK'S SECRET

Keep the sauce slightly loose and undercook the pasta. Both continue thickening in the oven and while resting. Add cheese off the heat, then bake hot and quickly for a creamy centre—not a dry, oily one.

Full recipe and printable card: kookssecrets.com

PROPER MACARONI CHEESE — FULL METHOD

THE CALM, COMPLETE METHOD

1. PREPARE THE PASTA

Heat oven to 220°C / 200°C fan and grease a 23 × 33 cm dish. Cook macaroni in well-salted boiling water until 2 minutes short of packet time. It should remain slightly firm. Drain without rinsing so the sauce can cling.

2. COOK THE ROUX

Melt 70 g butter over medium-low heat. Add flour and stir continuously for 2 minutes. Keep it pale: cooking removes the raw flour taste while preserving the béchamel’s clean colour.

3. BUILD A SILKY BÉCHAMEL

Whisk in one-quarter of the warm milk until smooth. Gradually add the rest. Simmer for 5–7 minutes until glossy and coating a spoon, yet still freely pourable.

4. MAKE THE CHEESE SAUCE

Remove the pan from heat for 1 minute. Add Dijon, nutmeg and black pepper. Stir in 200 g cheddar by handfuls until just melted. Taste before adding salt. Do not boil after adding cheese or the sauce may become oily or grainy.

5. ASSEMBLE WITHOUT DRYING

Fold macaroni through the sauce; it should look slightly too loose because pasta keeps absorbing liquid. Spoon into the dish. Mix breadcrumbs with melted butter, then scatter over with the remaining 50 g cheddar.

6. BAKE, REST + SERVE

Bake for 15–20 minutes until bubbling and deeply golden. Avoid a long bake, which thickens the sauce and dries the pasta. Rest 10 minutes so it settles while remaining creamy.

💡 THE SMART STRETCH

A strongly flavoured block of tasty cheddar gives more impact than mild pre-grated cheese. Grating it yourself usually costs less and melts more smoothly; yesterday’s bread can become the crisp topping.

ALLERGENS: MILK, GLUTEN + MUSTARD — CHECK PASTA + BREADCRUMBS FOR EGG OR SOY • CHILL WITHIN 2 HOURS • KEEP 3 DAYS AT 5°C OR COLDER • REHEAT ONCE UNTIL STEAMING HOT THROUGHOUT

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