

# Best Baked Mac n Cheese

Kurt

## Ingredients

- 16 oz elbow macaroni, cooked (or other tubular or twisty pasta, to make it fun or fancy)
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 6 tbsp unsalted butter
- ⅓ cup all purpose flour
- 3 cups milk
- 1 cup half n half
- 4 cups Colby/Jack cheese shredded (see notes)
- 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese shredded (try any pungent cheese you like, or that fits the occasion and your budget)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 cups panko crumbs
- 4 tbsp butter melted
- 1 cup Parmesan, Pecorino, or Romano cheese shredded
- ½ tsp paprika

## Instructions

Preheat oven 350°

1. Set the milk and half n half out to warm to room temperature.
2. Cook the pasta one minute shy of al dente according to the package instructions. Remove from heat, drain, and place in a large bowl. Drizzle pasta with olive oil and stir to coat pasta. Set aside to cool while preparing cheese sauce.
3. Lightly grease a large 3 qt or 4 qt baking dish or 9x13 cake pan and set aside.
4. Shred the cheeses and combine in a large bowl and set aside.
5. Melt butter in a deep saucepan, dutch oven, or stock pot. Whisk in flour over medium heat and continue whisking for about 1 minute until bubbly and golden.
6. Gradually whisk in the milk and half n half until nice and smooth. Continue whisking until you see bubbles on the surface and then continue cooking and whisking for another 2 minutes. Whisk in salt and pepper if desired (see notes).
7. Add two cups of shredded cheese and whisk until smooth. Add another two cups of shredded cheese and continue whisking until creamy and smooth. Sauce should be nice and thick.

8. Stir in the cooled pasta until combined and the pasta is fully coated with the cheese sauce.
9. Pour half of the mac and cheese into the prepared baking dish. Top with remaining 2 cups of shredded cheese and then the remaining mac and cheese.
10. In a small bowl, combine panko crumbs, Parmesan cheese, melted butter and paprika. Sprinkle over the top and bake until bubbly and golden brown, about 30 minutes.

## Notes

IMPORTANT: only use block or solid cheeses. Do not use pre-grated bagged cheese. They are treated with starches to keep the grated pieces from sticking together. The starches will keep the cheese from melting and mixing correctly.

You can substitute your regular milk with whole milk to give a thicker creamier texture, but also increase calories.

The half-n-half can be substituted with heavy cream for a truly decadent creamy experience.

For a twist use half mozzarella, half cheddar, or half gouda in the mild cheese. Also, try other cheese combinations that sound interesting.

Be cautious with the salt. Many cheeses are salted. I find it better to omit the salt and let diners salt to their own taste.

For more adult, complex flavor add the following to the roux with the flour, before adding cheese:

1 tsp garlic powder

1 tsp onion powder

1 tsp black pepper

½ tsp mustard powder

½ tsp allspice