

Creamy Mac and Cheese

Rich, cheesy, and perfectly seasoned — this baked mac and cheese is comfort food at its best.

Ingredients

Pasta

- 8 oz elbow pasta (or noodle of your choice)
- 1 bouillon cube (or 1 scoop)
- Salt (for pasta water)
- Butter (to toss with cooked noodles)

Seasoning Mix

- 1 tbsp onion powder
- 2 tbsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tbsp black pepper
- ½ tbsp seasoned salt

Cheese Sauce

- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
 - 2 tbsp flour (more if needed)
 - 1 (12 oz) can evaporated milk
 - 1 cup half and half (add more for a creamier sauce)
 - ½ cup cream cheese
 - 1 cup mozzarella, freshly grated (or 1 ½ cups if you like extra cheesy)
 - 1 cup sharp cheddar, freshly grated (or 1 ½ cups)
 - ½ cup gruyère, freshly grated (or 1 cup)
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Directions

Step 1: Cook the Pasta

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.
2. Add bouillon cube and pasta. Cook until **almost al dente** (it will finish cooking in the oven).
3. Drain (do not rinse). Toss with butter and a sprinkle of the seasoning mix. Set aside.

Step 2: Make the Seasoning Mix

- In a small bowl, combine onion powder, garlic powder, cayenne, black pepper, and seasoned salt.
 - You will use this mix throughout the recipe.
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Step 3: Build the Cheese Sauce

1. In a deep, non-stick pot, melt **3 tbsp butter**. Stir in **1 tbsp seasoning mix**.
 2. Whisk in **flour** until smooth and caramel-colored (a golden roux).
 - If overcooked, start again.
 3. Slowly whisk in evaporated milk until smooth.
 4. Gradually add half and half, cooking 3–7 minutes until slightly thickened.
 5. Season to taste with more seasoning mix. Simmer 2 minutes.
 6. Stir in **cream cheese** until melted.
 7. Add in most of the grated cheeses (reserve some for layering and topping). Stir until smooth.
 - Keep heat low to avoid burning.
 8. Adjust thickness: if too thick, add more half and half until creamy and pourable. Taste and adjust seasoning.
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Step 4: Combine Pasta & Sauce

1. Add cooked pasta to cheese sauce. Stir until evenly coated. Taste and adjust seasoning.
 2. Preheat oven to **375°F**.
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Step 5: Layer & Bake

1. Butter an oven-safe baking dish.
 2. Add half of the mac and cheese, sprinkle with some reserved grated cheese.
 3. Add remaining mac and cheese, then top with remaining cheese.
 4. Bake at **375°F for 20 minutes**, until bubbly, golden brown, and melted.
 5. Let rest **15 minutes before serving**.
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Notes & Tips

- Use any pasta shape with ridges or curves to hold cheese.
- Don't overcook pasta — it finishes baking in the oven.
- A deep non-stick pot makes sauce-making and mixing easier.
- Grate cheeses fresh for best melting.
- Start with light seasoning and build up — you can always add, but not take away.
- Sauce should look slightly runny before baking; it thickens in the oven.
- Resting time helps mac and cheese set for creamy slices.