

ADULT MACARONI AND CHEESE

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Ingredients:

- 1 pound Cavatappi pasta or other dry macaroni
- 1 stick butter
- 1/2 cup flour
- 4 cups milk
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1/4 cup dry sherry
- Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
- 1/2 pound grated Gruyere cheese
- 1/2 pound grated Sharp Cheddar cheese
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- Optional seasonings: fresh thyme, cayenne pepper
- Optional Topping: panko or bread crumbs



Directions:

If you plan to bake the macaroni and cheese to get a crispy top, preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Cook the macaroni in salted water according to the directions on the package until still slightly firm. I typically make this dish with Cavatappi which looks like an adult elbow macaroni, but since I'm serving the Adult Macaroni and Cheese in small ramekins on a tapas bar, I'm using mini elbow macaroni. Remember, macaroni, like potatoes and other grains cook by absorbing the liquid in which they are cooked. The better tasting the liquid, the better tasting your final dish, which is why it is important to add salt to the liquid before cooking.

To make the white sauce, begin with a roux. In a large pot, melt the butter. When butter is melted, add the flour and whisk together over medium-low heat for a minute or two just to get the raw taste out of the flour. For this light colored dish, we do not want to brown the roux. While whisking, add the milk and continue to cook until thick and smooth. To speed up the process, I sometimes pour the milk into a heat resistant cup and warm in the microwave before adding it to the roux.

Once the white sauce is thick and smooth, lower the heat and add the Dijon mustard, a pinch of freshly grated nutmeg and my secret ingredient, dry sherry. Sherry is another one of those fortified wines I buy in the local liquor store which is very inexpensive and will last in the pantry.

Add the shredded cheese and slowly melt into the white sauce. Add fresh thyme (*optional*). If you like a little heat, add cayenne pepper. Remove from the heat and gently stir in the cooked macaroni.

Serve immediately or pour into a baking dish sprayed with non-stick cooking spray, sprinkle with panko or bread crumbs and bake for 10 - 12 minutes for a crusty top. I'm preparing this dish to use at a tapas bar, so I'm using ramekins. If you are planning to freeze this for later use, cover tightly with plastic wrap before freezing. Enjoy!