

Best Potluck Macaroni and Cheese

SERVES 8 TO 10

Back American cheese from the deli counter is best here, as prewrapped singles result in a drier mac and cheese.

- 4 slices hearty white sandwich bread, torn into quarters
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 pound elbow macaroni
- Salt
- 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 3 (12-ounce) cans evaporated milk
- 2 teaspoons hot sauce
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 8 ounces extra-sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- 5 ounces American cheese, shredded (1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups)
- 3 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup)

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Pulse bread, melted butter, and Parmesan in food processor until ground to coarse crumbs, about 8 pulses. Transfer to bowl.

2. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add macaroni and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until just al dente, about 6 minutes. Reserve $\frac{1}{2}$ cup macaroni cooking water, then drain and rinse macaroni in colander under cold running water. Set aside.

3. Melt remaining 4 tablespoons butter in now-empty pot over medium-high heat. Stir in flour and cook,

stirring constantly, until mixture turns light brown, about 1 minute. Slowly whisk in evaporated milk, hot sauce, mustard, nutmeg, and 2 teaspoons salt and cook until mixture begins to simmer and is slightly thickened, about 4 minutes. Off heat, whisk in cheeses and reserved cooking water until cheese melts. Stir in macaroni until completely coated.

4. Transfer mixture to 13 by 9-inch baking dish and top evenly with bread-crumble mixture. Bake until cheese is bubbling around edges and top is golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Let sit for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

TO MAKE AHEAD: The macaroni and cheese can be made in advance through step 3. Increase amount of reserved macaroni cooking water to 1 cup. Scrape mixture into 13 by 9-inch baking dish, cool, lay plastic wrap directly on surface of pasta, and refrigerate for up to 1 day. Bread-crumble mixture may be refrigerated for up to 2 days. When ready to bake, remove plastic, cover with aluminum foil, and bake for 30 minutes. Uncover, sprinkle bread crumbs over top, and bake until topping is golden brown, about 20 minutes longer. Let sit before serving.

KEEPING IT TOGETHER

Using already stabilized ingredients like American cheese and evaporated milk ensures that this cheesy sauce doesn't break in the oven.

