

Damian's Mac and Cheese

Attribution: This recipe is based on [Alton Brown's Baked Macaroni and Cheese](#).

For best results, do not substitute out starred ingredients. Ingredients are first listed out individually, then grouped by "mis en place" for easier prep.

If you're planning on cooking in bulk, I don't recommend doubling all ingredients and making one big batch. I found this doesn't work well. Instead, I'd recommend making two separate batches at the same time.

Ingredients (full list)

- 1 (1 pound) box Cavatappi pasta
- 3-4 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 tablespoon ground powdered mustard
- 3 cups milk
- 1/2 cup yellow onion, finely diced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika. Can be hot or smoked.
- 1 teaspoon [Sweet Heat](#) pepper flakes from [Flatiron Pepper Co*](#)
NOTE: If you'd like a hotter version, substitute Sweet Heat with 1/2 teaspoon of [Hatch Valley Green](#) and 1/2 teaspoon of [Smoke Show*](#)
- 1 tablespoon liquid smoke
- 16 ounces [Cabot Seriously Sharp Cheddar](#) cheese, shredded*
NOTE: I typically buy two 8 oz blocks, but you can buy a 2 pound block if making this in bulk
NOTE: Do not buy pre-shredded cheese, as it contains anti-caking ingredients like potato and corn starch that will interfere with the roux.
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Fresh black pepper

Topping:

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup seasoned panko bread crumbs

Ingredients (mise en place grouping)

Pasta

- 1 (1 pound) box Cavatappi pasta

Bowl 1

- 3-4 tablespoons butter

Bowl 2

- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 tablespoon ground powdered mustard

Bowl 3

- 3 cups milk
- 1 tablespoon liquid smoke

Bowl 4

- 1/2 cup yellow onion, finely diced

Bowl 5

- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika. Can be hot or smoked.
- 1 teaspoon Sweet Heat pepper flakes from Flatiron Pepper Co*

NOTE: If you'd like a hotter version, substitute Sweet Heat with 1/2 teaspoon of Hatch Valley Green and 1/2 teaspoon of Smoke Show*

Bowl 6

- 16 ounces Cabot Seriously Sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded*

NOTE: I typically buy two 8 oz blocks, but you can buy a 2 pound block if making this in bulk

NOTE: Do not buy pre-shredded cheese, as it contains anti-caking ingredients like potato and corn starch that will interfere with the roux.

Added to taste

- kosher salt
- Fresh black pepper

Topping:

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup seasoned panko bread crumbs

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a large pot of boiling, salted water, cook the pasta to al dente.
3. While the pasta is cooking, in a separate pot, melt the butter. Over medium heat, whisk in the flour and mustard and keep it moving for about five minutes. Make sure it's free of lumps.
4. Stir in the milk, liquid smoke, onion, bay leaf, pepper flakes, and paprika. Simmer for ten minutes and remove the bay leaf.

NOTE: I find that temperature control is critical. I will typically raise the temperature to medium high as soon as I add the milk to bring the mixture up to temp, but only for a short amount of time. Do not let the mixture boil. Instead, once you get to a simmer drop the temp down to medium/medium-low to maintain a slow simmer. The mixture needs to be hot enough to melt the cheese in the next step without dropping too much temp in the process.

5. While still on heat, stir in 3/4 of the cheese a handful at a time, mixing between each addition. You want to make sure that the cheese has melted before you add more. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

6. Fold the macaroni into the mix and pour into a 2-quart casserole dish. Top with remaining cheese.
7. Melt the butter in a saute pan and toss the bread crumbs to coat. Top the macaroni with the bread crumbs. Bake for 30 minutes. Remove from oven and rest for five minutes before serving.