

Cauliflower & Speck Mac & Cheese

I have never really been a huge fan of pasta bakes. They tend to be too dry and the pasta is often overcooked. Not so with this delicious and creamy Mac Cheese! Smokey speck and earthy cauliflower take this old classic to new heights and the rosemary infused breadcrumbs provide the perfect amount of golden buttery crunch. Served in either a baking dish or individual ramekins it will be a firm family favourite (which should probably not be eaten that often if you are watching the waistline ;))!

Prep time: 30 Minutes

Cooking time: 50 Minutes

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Low Budget

Serves 4

400gm of macaroni pasta

1/2 a cauliflower, roughly chopped

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

1 brown onion, diced

250gm of speck, cut into little batons (lardons)

1 sprig of rosemary, leaves removed and finely chopped

6 thyme sprigs, leaves removed

1/2 cup of white wine

1 1/2 cups of milk

1 cup of cream

1 1/2 cups of tasty cheese (a good vintage tasty makes all the difference)

1/2 cup of fresh parmesan

Sea salt and pepper

For the Crumbs:

6 slices of stale sourdough or rye

1 clove of garlic, crushed

1 sprig of rosemary, leaves removed and finely chopped

40gm melted butter

Sea salt and cracked pepper

Heat a large pot of salted water to boiling and pour in the macaroni. Boil for 10 minutes before adding the cauliflower and boiling for a further 2 minutes until just tender. Drain and set aside.

Heat a large non-stick frypan to nice and hot and add the speck. Fry until golden and you shouldn't need any extra oil as the fat of the speck will render out and give fabulous flavour. Once golden add the onion, garlic, rosemary and thyme and fry until the onion is nice and soft. Pour in the wine and allow to reduce a little before adding the milk and cream. Season with a little salt and a good sprinkling of pepper and bring the mixture up to a simmer, stirring to combine. Simmer for 5-7 minutes or until the mixture reduces a little and starts to thicken. Add the cheeses and stir until all melted through.

Add the macaroni and cauliflower to the creamy mixture and stir to combine. Spoon the mixture into 4 individual ramekins or 1 large baking dish.

Pre heat the oven to 180°C.

To make the bread crumbs, roughly tear the bread pieces up and place it in a food processor. Add the rosemary leaves and pulse the mixture a couple of times before whizzing up into nice, somewhat chunky crumbs. Pour the mixture into a large mixing bowl and add the crushed garlic, pour over the melted butter and rub the crumbs with the tips of your fingers so they all become coated in the buttery, garlicky mixture. Divide the crumbs between the ramekins or top the baking dish with a generous amount. Freeze any leftover crumbs and use for crumbing schnitzels or for stuffing mix at a later date.

Bake the mac cheese in the oven for 25-30 minutes or until golden brown and bubbling. Serve with a nice green salad if you so desire.....