

Prairie Dust Mac & Cheese

Tips for the Best Homemade Baked Mac and Cheese

- Cook your pasta to slightly less than al dente, about one minute shy is perfect. The reason is that this is *smoked mac and cheese* so the pasta will continue to cook in the homemade cheese sauce in the smoker. You don't want soggy macaroni.
- I use small shell pasta but use your favorite shape.
- This mac and cheese recipe starts with a roux. The roux is super important to getting the creamiest cheese sauce of your life. Here is what you need to look for:
 - The roux (equal parts butter and flour) is whisked together until bubbly and golden.
 - Whisk in cold milk – not warm – to prevent the flour from clumping.
- The Cheese: Use block cheese and shred, do not buy the pre-shredded cheese. The pre-shredded cheese is great for so many things but not macaroni and cheese. It's coated and won't melt properly. You need to shred it yourself for the best result. Medium cheddar melts better than sharp, Pepper Jack, because...Pepper Jack, Gruyere adds a creamy, nutty flavor and finally Mozzarella for the nice stringy pull!

Ingredients

- 2 lb. SM shell macaroni, cooked
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 6 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 3 cups whole milk
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups medium cheddar cheese shredded
- 1 1/2 cups Pepper Jack cheese shredded
- 1 cup Gruyere cheese shredded
- 1 cup Mozzarella cheese shredded
- 5 tbsp CCC Prairie Dust BBQ Rub
- salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

1. Heat Smoker to 350F. Lightly grease a large baking dish and set aside. (I use 1/2 pan aluminum pan). Shred cheeses in a large bowl and set aside.
2. Add 1 1/2 - 2 tbsp of the Prairie Dust seasoning to the pasta water before cooking, Cook the pasta one minute shy of al dente according to the package instructions. Remove from heat, drain, and place in a large bowl.
3. Drizzle pasta with olive oil and stir to coat pasta. Set aside to cool while preparing cheese sauce.
4. Melt butter in a deep saucepan, Dutch oven, or stock pot.
5. Whisk in flour over MED heat and continue whisking for about 1 minute until bubbly and golden.
6. Gradually whisk in the milk and heavy cream until nice and smooth. Continue whisking until you see bubbles on the surface and then continue cooking and whisking for another 2 minutes. Whisk in salt and pepper and 2 tbsp Prairie Dust seasoning
7. Remove from heat and add Cheddar cheese and whisk until smooth. Add pepper Jack cheese and whisk until smooth and finally add Gruyere and Mozzarella and continue whisking until creamy and smooth. Sauce should be nice and thick.
8. Stir in the cooled pasta until combined and pasta is fully coated with the cheese sauce.
9. Pour the mac and cheese into the prepared baking dish and dust top with remaining Prairie Dust (Trust me!)
10. Put in smoker until bubbly and golden brown, about 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

