
Macaroni Cheese

A generous helping for one

Ingredients

1.5 cups macaroni (half pint size)
a dessertspoon plain white flour
same quantity of unsalted butter; can use oil or other fat in a pinch
3/4 pint milk (half litre)
2-4 oz cheese, grated (enough for 3-4 good sized handfuls)

Equipment

spoon
spatula
small and large saucepans
small/medium Pyrex casserole/dish
grater (you can use a potato peeler if stuck for one)

Method

First, make the cheese sauce. We do this first because it can sit around for 20 minutes, but the macaroni can't.

Melt the butter over medium heat in a small saucepan. It should be hot, but not smoking or brown. Stir in the flour with a wooden spatula, and stir it around for 20 seconds - 2 minutes; the flour needs to be cooked, but not start to brown.

Start to add the milk in small doses at a time, letting each helping be absorbed into the paste before adding the next. It is easier to add warm milk than cold, but a decent whisk can cure any lumpiness if needed. When you have finished adding the milk, the sauce should continue to heat for anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes before it is ready. The ideal consistency is roughly that of single or whipping cream, enough to coat the back of a spoon (so quite thin). Season with a small amount of salt (quarter to half a teaspoon), and a grating of black pepper. Add two good handfuls of grated cheese. The best sort is a medium cheddar, but any hard cheese that melts will do - you don't want very strongly flavoured, or very mild cheese. The consistency of the sauce will be slightly thicker than before you added the cheese.

Turn on the oven to heat: 160-180C.

Cook the macaroni in a large saucepan two third full of water, with a dessertspoon of salt. The salt is important. Make sure that the water is boiling briskly before adding the pasta, and keep it boiling - if you cover the pan, it is likely to boil over, so don't. Test the pasta by biting into a single bit, until it is a little harder than you would care to eat it; there should be some resistance, if not a little crunch. Immediately drain well in a sieve or colander; the pasta will continue to cook and soften while still hot.

Put the macaroni in the casserole, and pour over the cheese sauce, until the macaroni is barely covered. Top with another handful of grated cheese (the same, or parmesan - don't dare use ready grated parmesan).

Bake in the oven for 20-40 minutes. The pasta will finish cooking, and the cheese on top should start to brown.
