

Basic Baked Mac & Cheese:

Hardware:

- 2+ gallon stock pot
- 3+ qt. saucier or sauce pot.
- large collander
- large wooden spoon
- wire whisk
- baking dish

Software:

- 3 tbsp. butter
- 3 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 2 cups milk, scalded
- 1¼ lbs of sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 lbs. pasta (elbow noodles are classic)
- ½ cup kosher salt
- 1 tsp. white pepper (optional)
- 1 tsp. cayenne pepper (optional)

Procedure:

0. Assemble *mise en place* (*this is the unwritten first step to every recipe ever written*)
1. Add 1 gallon of water to stock pot. Add ½ cup kosher salt. Put on high heat covered.
2. Pre-heat oven to 350F.
3. Make light *roux* with butter and flour in saucier or sauce pot.
4. Remove roux from heat. Add milk and whisk briskly until combined. Add spices.
5. Bring mixture to boil over medium-high heat. You now have a basic *sauce béchamel*
6. Add cheese to *béchamel* one handful at a time, waiting for each addition to melt completely before adding the next.
7. Taste sauce. Add salt to taste if needed. (*this is the last step for any sauce or soup recipe!*)
8. Add pasta to boiling water. Boil for **half** the time the box tells you to, or taste until the noodles are soft on the outside, but still stiff and a little crunchy inside. (*you want it very undercooked*)
9. Drain pasta. Add directly to sauce, and combine thoroughly.
10. Move pasta and sauce mixture to baking dish. Cook at 350F for 20-30 minutes, until the cheese starts to brown.

Terms:

mise en place

French for “putting in place”. What this means is to assemble all of your hardware and software, measure, weigh, cut, shred, and otherwise prep the ingredients. Arrange your work environment in such a way that you can do everything you need to do. Notice under **software**, above, it specifies that the cheese is to be shredded and the milk is to be scalded. What that means is that when you assemble your *mise en place*, you do these things, as they won't be in the procedure.

roux

Is a cooking mixture of flour and fat, traditionally clarified butter if the recipe is French or lard if it's Cajun. This is the basis of many French soups and sauces, and virtually all Cajun cuisine. The purpose is two-fold. First, you want to surround all of the flour particles with fat, so that when liquid is introduced, it doesn't clump. Second, you want to cook the flour to get rid of that grainy raw flour taste.

Why is a *roux* the basis of a lot of sauces? When liquid is added to a roux, and it comes to a boil, the flour granules release starch, and thicken the sauce. If you just added flour directly to liquid, the flour would clump, and make a nasty lumpy sauce.

The recipe above mentions making a light *roux* with butter and flour– what this means is you want to melt your butter, add flour, and whisk briskly over medium heat, cooking just enough so the flour barely starts to take on color. Other recipes call for “blonde”, “peanut butter”, or “chocolate” *roux*, referring to the color of the mixture when it's finished cooking. Cajun cuisines like gumbo call for roux that is almost black, and has a rich, nutty flavor.

sauce béchamel

One of the five “mother sauces” of French cuisine, upon which most other sauces are built. It is made simply by whisking scalded milk into a light *roux* made with equal parts butter and flour. The thickness of the sauce is based on the ratio of milk to flour. If you master this sauce, you can make a wide array of creamy sauces by adding herbs, spices, meat, cheese, vegetable purees, etc.

scalded milk

Milk that is heated to around 160-180F. The reason for this in this recipe is so the milk is more similar in temperature to the *roux* it is being added to. The easiest method is to microwave milk for 30 second increments, and check it's temperature. I usually just stick my finger in it – if it burns, it's ready.

Note on pasta:

the recipe calls for the pasta to be only half-cooked. Why? Because it's going to cook further in the oven. If you cooked it all the way, it would be over-done after baking.