

Cheesy Cauliflower and Cavatappi

Serves 10–12

This bake is the perfect marriage of two comfort food classics: British cauliflower cheese and our beloved mac & cheese. Tender florets and twirly cavatappi noodles are smothered in a luscious cheese sauce made with sharp cheddar, nutty Gruyère, smoked gouda and creamy fontina. It's the kind of dish that feels right at home on a weeknight table yet impressive enough for a holiday spread. You can mix and match cheeses to suit your taste—just be sure to balance bold, sharp varieties with milder, creamier ones.

Ingredients

Kosher salt, to taste
6 cups cauliflower florets (about 1.5 pounds), cut into ½- to 1-inch pieces
1 pound dried cavatappi pasta
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon mustard powder
3 cups whole milk
8 ounces aged cheddar cheese,
shredded 8 ounces Gruyère cheese,
shredded 8 ounces smoked gouda cheese,
shredded 8 ounces fontina cheese,
shredded ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper,
optional ½ cup plain breadcrumbs
1½ tablespoons minced fresh thyme

Directions

Preheat the oven to 400°. Set aside a deep oven-safe 9- by 13-inch pan. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Generously season with salt. Add the cauliflower florets and cook for 4 minutes. Transfer the florets with a slotted spoon or skimmer to the 9- by 13-inch pan.

Return the water to a boil and add the pasta. Boil for 1 minute less than al dente (roughly 9 minutes). When al dente, reserve 1 cup of pasta water, then transfer the pasta with a Cheesy Cauliflower and Cavatappi Bake skimmer to the pan along with the cauliflower. While the cauliflower and pasta are cooking, prepare the cheese sauce. Heat a large skillet over medium heat. Melt the butter in it, then whisk in the flour and mustard powder. Cook for 2 minutes. While continuously whisking, add the milk and the reserved cup of pasta water. Gently bring to a boil over low heat, whisking often, until the mixture begins to thicken. Add ¾ of the shredded cheeses, the cayenne pepper and salt to taste. Stir until the cheese is fully incorporated into the sauce. Pour the cheese sauce over the cauliflower and pasta in the baking pan and mix well until evenly coated. Combine the remaining cheese with the breadcrumbs and thyme, sprinkle evenly

over the top, and place the pan back in the oven, uncovered. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes or until the top is golden brown and the cheese is bubbling. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

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