

1 hour

Serves 6-8

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Ingredients

- ⅛ cup (80ml) butter
- 2 large onions, sliced
- ¼ cup (60ml) water
- Salt and milled pepper
- Fresh thyme, for serving

Basic mac 'n cheese:

- 8 cups (2L) milk
- 4-6 bay leaves
- 1 onion, sliced
- 2-3 cloves garlic, peeled and lightly crushed
- Handful black peppercorns
- 1 packet (500g) elbow macaroni
- ½ cup (125ml) butter
- ½ cup (125ml) flour
- Salt and milled pepper
- 1 tsp (5ml) smoked paprika
- 2 cups (240g) grated cheddar cheese
- 1 cup (100g) grated gruyère cheese (or any other hard cheese)
- 1 cup (120g) grated mozzarella
- 2 tsp (10ml) Dijon mustard
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme, chopped
- Pinch cayenne pepper

Topping:

- 1 cup (100g) grated gruyère cheese (or any other hard cheese)
- ½ cup (60g) grated cheddar cheese

Method

1. Heat butter in a pan over medium heat.
2. Tip in onions, water and a pinch of salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until caramelised (about 20–25 minutes). Set aside.
3. Gently heat milk, bay leaves, onion, garlic and peppercorns in a pot for 8–10 minutes.
4. Meanwhile cook macaroni in a pot of salted boiling water for 8 minutes, then drain and set aside.
5. Remove milk from heat. Cover and leave to infuse for at least 10 minutes, then strain out aromatics.
6. Melt butter in a large saucepan. Remove from heat and vigorously whisk in flour until a smooth paste (roux) forms.
7. Return to stove and pour in ½ cup (125ml) infused milk, whisking continuously.
8. Add remaining milk in batches, allowing sauce to thicken slightly before next addition. (This will take about 10 minutes.)
9. Season with salt and pepper and add paprika.
10. Remove from heat and stir in cheese (in batches). Set aside
11. Stir cooked pasta, onion mixture, mustard, thyme and cayenne pepper through sauce, coating well. Season.
12. Spoon into a 30cm ovenproof dish, top with cheese and grill in the oven until bubbly and golden, about 10–15 minutes.
13. Sprinkle with thyme and serve warm.

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