



Stovetop Pumpkin Mac & Cheese

Time: 20 minutes

Serves 4 to 6

You can make this mac & cheese with any cheese that melts well, but a young Gruyère's sweet, nutty flavor tastes especially nice with the pumpkin. (And Gruyère reminds me of fondue, which reminds me of the Alps, which I love.) See below for some other suggestions.

While you *can* use pre-shredded cheese, I think it tastes better if you don't.

3 ½ cups water

½ cup heavy cream

One 15-ounce can 100% pure pumpkin puree

Salt

1 pound macaroni

8 ounces young Gruyère cheese (about 6 months of aging) or other melting cheese

Freshly ground pepper

Start cooking the macaroni and grate the cheese

In a large pot, stir together the water, cream, and pumpkin puree with 1 ½ teaspoons salt. Stir in the macaroni and bring the liquid to a simmer over medium-high heat.

While you're waiting for the liquid to come to a simmer, coarsely grate the cheese on a box grater or use your food processor's grating attachment.

Finish cooking the mac and cheese

When the liquid reaches a simmer, reduce the heat to medium and cook, stirring frequently, until most of the macaroni is peeking through the surface of the sauce and it's just barely al dente, 3 to 4 minutes.

Add about one-third of the grated cheese and stir to incorporate. As it melts, add another one-third of the cheese. When it's melted, add the remaining one-third of the cheese and turn off the heat. Stir, allowing the residual heat to melt the cheese.

Taste and season with more salt if desired. Season with several grinds of black pepper, transfer to bowls, and serve immediately.

Extra credit

- Because the texture of the mac & cheese is best when it's warm, warm the serving bowls for a few minutes in a 200°F oven or for 30 seconds in a microwave (assuming they're microwave safe).

Swaps

- Other cheese ideas:
 - 7 ounces grated white cheddar cheese with 1 ounce grated Parmesan
 - 8 ounces Monterey jack or pepper jack cheese
 - 4 ounces smoked gouda with 4 ounces young gouda
- Instead of macaroni, try other short pasta. Note this recipe was tested with pasta that cooks in 7 to 8 minutes according to the box. If it needs to cook longer (say 10 to 12 minutes), you will need $\frac{1}{2}$ cup more water.
- Instead of heavy cream, try sour cream, crème fraîche or Mascarpone. Or milk, but it won't be as rich.

Additions

- To up the creamy quotient, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cream cheese and allow it to melt just before adding the grated cheese.
- Add 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard with the pumpkin puree.
- Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon smoked paprika with the pumpkin.
- Stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg before serving.

Fun for kids

- Stir together the water, cream, pumpkin, and pasta
- Grate the cheese (if they have the hand-eye coordination)

