

How to Make the Best Spicy Korean-Inspired Mac & Cheese

Perfectly Balanced Richness:



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30 min

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INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb elbow macaroni (or other short pasta like shells or cavatappi)
- 6 strips thick-cut bacon, chopped
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2-3 tbsp gochujang (Korean chili paste)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup whole milk
- 3 cups shredded cheese (a mix of sharp cheddar and Monterey Jack is great)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced, for garnish

Swaps and Notes:

The Pasta: While classic elbows are great, I love using shells or cavatappi because their ridges and tubes are perfect for trapping every last bit of the cheesy sauce.

The Gochujang: This is the star ingredient. Look for gochujang paste in a tub in the international aisle of your grocery store or at an Asian market. It's not the same as gochujang sauce. Different brands have different spice levels, so I recommend starting with 2 tablespoons and adding more if you want a bigger kick.

The Cheese: This is critical for amazing mac and cheese: shred your own cheese! Pre-shredded cheeses are coated in anti-caking agents that can make your sauce gritty. A combination of a flavorful cheese

(like sharp cheddar or Gruyère) and a super-melty cheese (like Monterey Jack or fontina) will give you the best results.

The Roux: Don't skip the step of making a roux (cooking the flour in the bacon fat). This is the secret to a thick, stable, and ultra-creamy cheese sauce that won't break or become oily.

How to Make Gochujang Bacon Mac & Cheese:

Cook the Pasta: Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the macaroni according to package directions for al dente. Just before draining, reserve about 1 cup of the starchy pasta water, then drain the pasta.

Cook the Bacon: While the pasta is cooking, place the chopped bacon in a large, cold skillet or Dutch oven. Turn the heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until the bacon is brown and crispy (about 8-10 minutes). Use a slotted spoon to transfer the crispy bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving about 2 tablespoons of rendered fat in the skillet.

Build the Sauce Base: Reduce the heat to medium-low. Whisk the flour into the hot bacon fat until a paste forms. Cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly, to cook out the raw flour taste. Add the minced garlic and cook for another 30 seconds until fragrant.

Incorporate the Gochujang: Whisk the gochujang paste into the roux until it's fully combined.

Make it Creamy: Slowly pour in the milk and heavy cream, whisking constantly to ensure a smooth, lump-free sauce. Let it simmer gently for 2-3 minutes, until it has thickened slightly.

Add the Cheese: Remove the skillet from the heat. This is key to prevent the sauce from becoming grainy. Add the shredded cheese one handful at a time, stirring until each addition is melted before adding the next. Once all the cheese is incorporated, your sauce should be smooth and velvety. Season with a little salt and pepper to taste.

Combine and Serve: Add the drained macaroni and the crispy bacon back into the skillet with the cheese sauce. Stir until everything is well-coated. If the sauce is too thick, add a splash of the reserved pasta water until it reaches your desired consistency. Serve immediately, garnished with a generous sprinkle of sliced scallions.

Tips for Success:

Shred Your Own Cheese: I'm saying it one more time because it is the single most important tip for creamy mac and cheese. The results are worth the tiny bit of extra effort.

Reserve That Pasta Water: The starchy water is a magic ingredient that helps emulsify the sauce and thin it out without making it watery. Don't forget

to save some!

Temper the Gochujang: Whisking the gochujang into the roux before adding the liquid helps it dissolve evenly into the sauce for consistent flavor in every bite.

Heat Off for the Cheese: Always add your cheese off the heat. High heat can cause the proteins in the cheese to seize up and make your sauce oily and grainy.

More Comfort Food Mashups You'll Love:

This Dorito Casserole is My Favorite Weeknight Dinner Shortcut: A fun, cheesy, and crunchy casserole that's part taco, part masterpiece.

These Totchos Are My Favorite Party Food Hack (Tater Tot Nachos!): Why choose between tater tots and nachos when you can have both?

This Crockpot Nacho Dip is the Reason I Never Have Leftovers: The ultimate cheesy, meaty, and spicy dip for any occasion.

This Beer Cheese Dip is My Favorite Party Starter: A classic comfort dip that's always a crowd-pleaser.

Classic Spaghetti Recipe with Homemade Sauce: For the days you crave pure, unadulterated classic comfort.

Final Thoughts:

DIRECTIONS

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12. **More Comfort Food Mashups You'll Love:** If you love creative twists on classic comfort foods, you're in the right place. Check out these other flavor-packed favorites:
13. **This : Dorito Casserole is My Favorite Weeknight Dinner Shortcut:** A fun, cheesy, and crunchy casserole that's part taco, part masterpiece.
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17. **Classic : Spaghetti Recipe with Homemade Sauce:** For the days you crave pure, unadulterated classic comfort.
18. **Final Thoughts:** This Gochujang Bacon Mac & Cheese is a bold, beautiful, and wildly delicious dish that proves that even the most perfect foods can be made more exciting. It's the comfort you crave with a kick you won't forget. I dare you to try it-it just might become your new favorite way to make mac and cheese.
19. **Let me know if you venture into this flavor explosion in the comments below! And be sure to follow ChefManiac on social media for more recipes that push the boundaries of deliciousness.**

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