

Cheesy Garlic Cajun Chicken Penne: The Ultimate Comfort Food Dinner

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TIME
6-8 min

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INGREDIENTS

1 lb boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-sized cubes

2 tbsp olive oil

2 tbsp Cajun seasoning

1 tsp garlic powder

$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp smoked paprika

12 oz penne pasta

4 tbsp butter

4 cloves garlic, minced

... cup all-purpose flour

3 cups whole milk

8 oz Velveeta cheese, cubed

4 oz cream cheese, softened

1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

... cup grated Parmesan cheese

Salt and black pepper, to taste

Fresh parsley or chopped chives (optional, for garnish)

Swaps & Notes:

Chicken: Boneless, skinless chicken thighs would also work wonderfully and stay incredibly moist. You can also swap the chicken for smoked sausage for a more traditional Cajun flavor.

Pasta: Any short pasta shape like fusilli, cavatappi, or rotini would be a great substitute for the penne.

Cajun Seasoning: Adjust the amount of Cajun seasoning based on your spice preference. You can also use your favorite homemade blend.

Cheese: While the Velveeta is key for that ultra-creamy texture, you can experiment with other cheeses. For a sharper flavor, try using shredded sharp cheddar.

DIRECTIONS

1. **Cook the : Pasta:** Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the penne pasta according to the package directions until al dente. Drain the pasta and set it aside.
2. **Season the : Chicken:** While the pasta is cooking, toss the chicken cubes in a bowl with the olive oil, Cajun seasoning, garlic powder, and smoked paprika until every piece is well coated.
3. **Sear the : Chicken:** Heat a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the seasoned chicken and sear for 6-8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until it is browned and cooked through. Remove the chicken from the skillet and set it aside on a plate.
4. **Make the : Roux:** Reduce the heat to medium. In the same skillet, melt the butter. Add the minced garlic and sauté for about 1 minute until it's fragrant.
5. **Form the : Sauce Base:** Whisk in the flour and cook for 1-2 minutes, creating a light roux. This will thicken your sauce.
6. **Add the : Dairy:** Slowly pour in the whole milk while continuously whisking to prevent lumps. Bring the mixture to a simmer and let it cook for 3-5 minutes, or until it has thickened slightly.
7. **Melt the : Cheeses:** Reduce the heat to low. Stir in the cubed Velveeta and the softened cream cheese. Continue to stir until the cheese is completely melted and the sauce is smooth and creamy.
8. **Finish the : Sauce:** Add the shredded mozzarella and grated Parmesan cheese, stirring until they are fully melted and combined into the sauce. Season with salt and black pepper to taste.

9. Combine and : Serve: Return the cooked chicken and the drained penne pasta to the skillet. Mix everything together until the chicken and pasta are completely coated in the rich, cheesy Cajun garlic sauce.
10. Serve the pasta warm, garnished with fresh parsley or chopped chives if desired.

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TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Use a Large Skillet: A large skillet or Dutch oven is essential for this recipe.

It allows you to cook the chicken and make the sauce in the same pan, which builds layers of flavor.

Don't Rush the Roux: Cooking the flour and butter for a minute or two will cook out the raw flour taste and ensure a smooth, delicious sauce.

Low and Slow: When melting the cheeses, keep the heat on low.

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