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So, it is winter and the holidays are over — a warm, comforting thing to do is to invite a few people over and tell them you are making Macaroni and Cheese — Serve it with a Green Salad and Fresh Tangerines and you have a simple supper for a cold winter's night. This recipe is from my friend Marion Cunningham who wrote a terrific book for the new cook last year — you can actually use any leftover cheese — except blue — for instance Gouda or Provolone — mixed with a mild white cheese and leftover Parmesan. People will love it!



Tante Marie's Original Macaroni and Cheese

Ingredients

8 cups water (2 quarts)
 1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. salt
 2 cups medium or large-size elbow macaroni
 4 Tbs. butter (1/2 stick)
 1/4 cup all-purpose white flour
 2 cups milk
 1-1/2 cups grated sharp cheddar cheese
 1/4 tsp. pepper



Instructions

COOKING THE MACARONI

Pour the water and 1 Tbs. salt in a 4 to 5 qt. pot and set over high heat. The water will come to a boil more quickly if you cover the pot.

When the water boils, add the macaroni and stir so it doesn't stick to the bottom of the pot.

After 10 minutes, scoop up a piece of macaroni and taste it. Be careful not to burn your tongue. If the noodle is tender, it is done. If it's still a bit firm, cook for 2 more minutes and check again.

Dump the macaroni into a colander set in the sink, and let the water drain away.

Put the macaroni in a heatproof bowl or casserole large enough to hold 6 cups.

MAKING THE WHITE SAUCE

While the macaroni is cooking, melt the butter in a small saucepan over medium heat, stirring regularly. Don't walk away from the stove; the whole process only takes about 6 minutes.

Add the flour and stir continuously for about 2 minutes to blend the ingredients.

Slowly pour in the milk and stir constantly, scraping the bottom and sides of the pot so nothing sticks. Continue stirring vigorously until the sauce thickens to the consistency of thick cream.



ADDING THE CHEESE

Add the cheese, 1/2 tsp. salt, and the pepper to the white sauce and stir until it is smooth and the cheese melts (2 to 3 minutes).

Taste the sauce. If it is bland, add another 1/2 tsp. salt.

FINISHING THE DISH AND KEEPING IT WARM

Pour the cheese sauce over the macaroni and mix until the sauce evenly coats the pasta.

If you are not quite ready to eat, put the dish in a 300 degree oven to keep if warm. Leave it in the oven no longer than 20 minutes, though, or it will become dry.

If you think the dish is a bit dry, you can moisten it by adding 1/2 cup hot milk and mixing it well.

Serves 4.

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(Recipe adapted from *Learning to Cook* with Marion Cunningham)