

Mac and Greens
Serves 10 to 12

Sometimes you put a dish on the menu to try it out, and it takes over. You find that out when you take it off the menu and there's a chorus of disappointed voices. That dish has become a classic.

I wanted comfort food, but I knew I needed something to cut the richness. Collards give you something to chew on and a different kind of richness. Then I took another left turn and slipped in some cauliflower for another level of texture. Everybody agrees. Mac and Greens is yummy.

Cut the cauliflower into very small florets—the size of a fingernail.

For the Mac and Greens

4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter
½ cup thinly sliced shallots
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
4 cups (1 quart) heavy cream
1 cup milk
1½ cups tiny cauliflower florets
½ cup crème fraîche
8 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
4 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded
4 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (½ packed cup)
1 teaspoon mustard powder
¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
Coarse kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper
1 pound orecchiette or other small, sturdy pasta, cooked until just tender
2 cups Killer Collards (recipe with cookbook selections), reheated

For the topping

⅓ cup dry bread crumbs
¼ packed cup fresh parsley leaves
2 packed tablespoons fresh basil leaves
2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (¼ packed cup)
¼ teaspoon coarse kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

For the Mac and Greens

Set a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the broiler. Butter a 9-x-13-inch baking dish.

Melt the butter in a large pot over medium heat. Add the shallots and cook, stirring often, until turning golden, 9 to 10 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the flour and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Pour in half the cream and cook, stirring, until the sauce thickens and comes to a simmer. Pour in the remaining cream, the milk, and the cauliflower and cook, stirring, until the sauce boils. Turn off the heat and add the crème fraîche and cheeses. Whisk until the cheeses melt. Whisk in the mustard, nutmeg, and salt and pepper to taste. Add the pasta and collards and stir well. Pour into the baking dish.

For the topping

Put all the ingredients into a food processor and pulse until the herbs are minced. Strew evenly over the mac and greens.

Broil until the topping is golden, 3 to 4 minutes. Leave this to rest for 30 minutes before serving.

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