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## **BUTTERNUT MAC**

SERVES 6

This mac-and-cheese recipe was born from my deep love for both roasted butternut squash and mac and cheese. When I discovered that sweet, salty, buttery butternut lends itself so perfectly to a silky cheese sauce, I realized my prayers for nondairy cheese had been answered. A dash of dried rosemary adds a sophisticated, aromatic layer of flavor.

About 5 cups (20 ounces) peeled and cubed **butternut squash**

2 tablespoons **olive oil**

2¼ teaspoons **sea salt**

Freshly ground **black pepper**

1 pound **elbow macaroni**

2 cups **water**, plus more as needed

½ cup **raw cashews** (see Tip, page 11/see below)

1 **garlic clove**

½ teaspoon **dried rosemary**

Toppings: **Smoky Shiitake Bacon** (recipe follows) and **smoked paprika**

**MAKE-AHEAD TIP:** The sauce can be made in advance and stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

**MAKE IT GLUTEN-FREE:** Use gluten-free pasta.

To roast the butternut squash, preheat the oven to 400°F. On a small rimmed baking sheet, toss the squash with the olive oil, ¼ teaspoon of the salt, and season with pepper. Roast for about 30 minutes, until fork tender, turning occasionally with a spatula during baking.

Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta and cook to al dente according to the package directions. Drain the pasta and return it to the pot, off the heat.

In a blender, combine the roasted butternut squash, water, cashews, garlic, rosemary, and remaining 2 teaspoons of salt. Blend on high speed for about 2 minutes, until very smooth. Add the sauce to the pot with the pasta and toss to coat. Taste and adjust the seasoning. If the sauce is too thick, add water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the desired consistency is reached. Top each serving with Smoky Shiitake Bacon and dust with smoked paprika.

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## TIP

Blending nuts with water is a technique I use often to make luscious, dairy-free creams that serve as a base for sauces, soups, or desserts. If you have a high-powered blender (see page 17), you can blend your nuts raw without any kind of soaking. If you do not have a high-powered blender, you can try using them raw, but if you have trouble, soak the nuts overnight or in boiling water for 10 minutes, then drain them before blending. This will soften them and ensure a silky-smooth cream once blended.

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## smoky shiitake bacon

MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

About 1 cup (4 ounces) **shiitake mushrooms**, de-stemmed and thinly sliced (about ¼ inch thick)

2 tablespoons **olive oil**

¼ teaspoon **sea salt**, plus more as needed

¼ teaspoon **smoked paprika**

¼ teaspoon **garlic powder**

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

On a large rimmed baking sheet, toss the mushrooms with the olive oil and salt. Arrange the mushrooms in a single layer. Bake for 20 to 30 minutes, turning occasionally with a spatula, until lightly browned and very crisp. Remove from oven and toss with the smoked paprika and garlic powder. Season with salt to taste. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days.

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