



The
Twisted
Soul
Cookbook

*Modern
Soul Food with
Global Flavors*

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RIZZOLI
NEW YORK



BACON-PRALINE MACARONI AND CHEESE

SERVES 12

6 cups elbow macaroni (about 1½ pounds), cooked al dente and drained
1 tablespoon Lawry's Seasoned Salt
1 tablespoon ground white pepper
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon onion powder
3½ cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (about 1½ pounds), divided
½ cup unsalted butter
½ cup all purpose flour
8 cups milk, warmed
6 ounces cream cheese, diced
12 ounces American cheese, diced
3 large eggs
8 ounces applewoods smoked bacon (8 to 10 slices), cooked and crumbled

PRALINE TOPPING

½ cup unsalted butter, melted
2 cups coarsely chopped pecans or pecan pieces
1 cup packed light brown sugar
½ cup dried breadcrumbs

James Hemings, the chef and slave of Thomas Jefferson, is credited for introducing the nation to what we call macaroni and cheese. Originally it was considered a refined, upper-crust dish with roots stretching back to Italy, France, and England. As the dish gained popularity and its ingredients became more accessible to the average person, it became more of a comfort food for the masses, rather than a dish reserved for the rich.

For me, its roots trace back to the sixties when commodity food, which included processed cheese, was distributed by the government to tables like mine. Although I have tasted versions of this dish all over the world, with cheeses produce by artisans, it still doesn't compare to ones I've had in the most humble of kitchens. The women of my family were well versed in turning commodity cheese into liquid gold. It was a cheap dish that could feed a lot of people.

This updated version puts a fun twist on a historic dish and is great for serving large groups or for a potluck supper. It can be made days in advance and frozen for convenience. If this recipe is too large, you can freeze half of it for another meal. Just thaw and reheat it in a 325-degree F oven for 20 minutes until heated through. Now that's comfort!

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Transfer the cooked macaroni to a large bowl.

In a small bowl, stir together the seasoned salt, white pepper, garlic powder, and onion powder. Sprinkle half of this seasoning mixture and 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese over the macaroni and toss to combine.

In a large saucepan over medium high heat, melt the butter. Whisk in the flour and continue to whisk for 3 to 5 minutes, until it makes a light roux. Reduce the heat to medium and whisk in the milk. Once all the milk is incorporated, cook for another 5 to 8 minutes, until the sauce reaches a simmer. Add the diced cream cheese and American cheese in batches, stirring until smooth. Stir in 1½ cups of the remaining shredded cheddar cheese and turn off the heat. Add the remaining seasoning mixture and stir well. Quickly whisk in the eggs until they are incorporated.

Spread the macaroni mixture evenly into a 12-inch cast-iron skillet. Pour the cheese sauce over the noodles to cover, then fold in the chopped bacon. Top with the remaining 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese. Cover the skillet with foil, transfer to the oven, and bake for 30 minutes, or until the cheese is bubbling around the edges.

FOR THE TOPPING: In a medium bowl, stir all the ingredients together with a fork.

Remove the foil from the baked macaroni and cheese, sprinkle the breadcrumb mixture over the top, and return, uncovered, to the oven. Bake for an additional 15 minutes, or until the topping is golden brown. Let the dish rest for 15 minutes before serving.