

# Butternut Squash Mac & Cheese

## INGREDIENTS

- 12 oz cavatappi
- 2 cups butternut squash, diced into ½-inch cubes
- Olive oil
- 1 whole head garlic
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ cups whole milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1-2 tbsp brown butter (optional but recommended)
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- ⅛ tsp cayenne (optional)
- ½-1 tsp salt, to taste
- ½-1 tsp lemon juice
- 1 cup sharp white cheddar, freshly grated
- 1 cup Gruyère, freshly grated
- *Optional: ½ cup mozzarella for extra stretch*

### For the Topping:

- ¾ cup panko
- ¾ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- 2 tbsp melted butter
- Salt & pepper
- 1-2 tsp finely chopped fresh sage (*optional for kiddos*)

### Crispy Sage

- 8-10 whole sage leaves
- 2 tbsp butter or olive oil

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. Spread the butternut squash on a lined sheet pan and drizzle with olive oil, salt, and pepper.
3. Slice the top ¼ inch off the garlic head, drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with salt, wrap in foil, and place on the sheet pan.
4. Roast everything for 20-25 minutes, or until the squash is caramelized and tender and the garlic is soft.
5. Squeeze the roasted garlic from its skins into a small bowl and mash.
6. Set the roasted squash aside.
7. Cook cavatappi in salted water until al dente.
8. Reserve ¼ cup pasta water, then drain and set aside.
9. In a large pot, melt 2 tbsp butter over medium heat.
10. Whisk in the flour and cook for 1 minute.
11. Slowly whisk in the milk and cream until smooth.
12. Stir in the roasted squash, 3-5 cloves mashed roasted garlic, Dijon mustard, smoked paprika, cayenne (if using), salt & pepper, brown butter, and lemon juice.
13. Simmer for 2-3 minutes. For a smoother sauce, blend briefly with an immersion blender (optional).

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14. Reduce heat to low and fold in the cheddar, Gruyère, and mozzarella (if using).
15. Add pasta water as needed for a glossy, silky consistency.
16. Add the cooked pasta to the sauce and stir until fully coated.
17. In a bowl, combine panko, Parmesan, melted butter, salt & pepper, and chopped sage.
18. Mix until the crumbs are evenly coated.
19. Pour the mac & cheese into a baking dish.
20. Sprinkle the Parmesan-panko topping evenly over the surface.
21. Bake at 375°F for 15-20 minutes, or until golden and bubbling.
22. Make the crispy sage: Heat butter or olive oil in a small skillet over medium heat. Add sage leaves and fry for 20-30 seconds, until crisp. Transfer to paper towels.
23. Before serving, top the mac & cheese with crispy sage leaves (I put them in one corner), extra Parmesan, black pepper, a light sprinkle of flaky salt, and a drizzle of brown butter (optional).