

Savory Sausage Mac and Cheese (in a pumpkin!) – Comfort du Jour

For some time, I've imagined making a showstopper like this—I've taken the quintessential comfort food, macaroni and cheese, and merged it with the best flavors of Thanksgiving—sausage, dark greens, onions and sage, and then stuffed the whole thing into a sweet little pumpkin. The result is as delicious as it is delightful to look at, from the creamy and comforting texture of a gruyere cheese sauce that's been spiked with pumpkin and savory roasted garlic, to the warm and rustic flavors of pork sausage, sautéed leafy kale and twice baked seasonal pumpkin.

You could make this recipe with half as much mac and cheese filling as the instructions describe. I only used a third of it in the small-ish pumpkin and poured the rest into a separate casserole dish for later. If you don't feel up to the task of messing with the pumpkin at all, I promise the mac and cheese is worth its weight all by itself. This was SO much fun!

INGREDIENTS

- 1 small pie pumpkin (mine was about 3 pounds)
- Extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper
- 1 medium onion, chopped and divided between cheese sauce and sausage filling
- 3 Tbsp. salted butter
- 3 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 2 cups whole milk
- 3 oz. (6 Tbsp.) mascarpone (or full fat cream cheese)
- 1/2 cup canned pumpkin puree (not pie filling)
- 1 cup freshly shredded gruyere cheese
- 1/2 cup freshly shredded sharp white cheddar cheese
- 1 whole bulb roasted garlic
- 12 oz. box elbow macaroni, cooked to al dente
- 8 oz. seasoned bulk pork sausage (mine had sage and black pepper)
- 2 heaping cups fresh kale leaves, chopped
- 2 Tbsp. grated parm-romano blend, for sprinkling just before baking

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350° F, and remove top rack to allow ample headspace for the height of your pumpkin.
2. Using a sharp knife, carefully cut the top off a sugar pumpkin (the same kind you'd use for a pie), and remove the seeds. Don't overthink this step; it's exactly what you'd do if you were carving a pumpkin for Halloween.

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3. Drizzle, brush or spray oil inside the pumpkin cavity, and give it a good seasoning with salt and pepper.
4. Replace the pumpkin “lid” and roast in the oven for 45 minutes. I wrapped foil over the long stem to prevent burning.
5. Meanwhile, prep your béchamel sauce, following the same guidelines I offered in this post for [basic mac and cheese](#). Make the roux with onions, add the whole milk and whisk until thickened, then add mascarpone (or cream cheese), pumpkin puree and shredded gruyere and sharp cheddar. Season with white pepper and freshly ground nutmeg. Add roasted garlic, and then use immersion blender to puree it into the creamiest sauce.
6. Cook the pasta to al dente stage, which is just a bit shy of tender. Remember that the pasta will finish cooking with the cheese sauce during the baking stage.
7. Brown the seasoned sausage with diced onions, then add chopped kale and cook until the kale is wilted.
8. Drain the pasta (do not rinse it), then add the béchamel/cheese sauce to it. You want it to seem overly saucy, to accommodate the other components in the filling.
9. Fold the sausage mixture into the mac and cheese, and then spoon it into the roasted pumpkin, packing it in as tightly as possible.
10. Top the mac and cheese with a generous sprinkling of parm-romano blend cheese, replace the top, and bake at 350° F for 45 minutes.
11. Allow the stuffed pumpkin to rest about 10 minutes, then cut into wedges and serve.