

Leftover Mac & Cheese with Collards and Sausage – Comfort du Jour

Every once in a blue moon, the random leftovers in my fridge have a common thread and speak to me in a way that leads to a crazy good meal that hardly feels like leftovers at all. This recipe gives new life to leftover southern collard greens, a single smoked sausage, some crumbs of ghost pepper potato chips and too many half-used chunks of cheese in the deli drawer.

Kick up mac and cheese, baby—inspired by the Mac and Greens dish we had at The Red Rooster, a Harlem restaurant owned by celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson.

INGREDIENTS

6 oz. orrechiette* (I had about half of a 12 oz. box)
3 Tbsp. each butter and flour
1 3/4 cups whole milk (2% would be OK, but less rich)
5 oz. American cheese (the kind you get by the pound in the deli)
6 oz. sharp cheddar cheese, shredded* (most of a regular block)
A few twists of freshly ground black pepper
1 cup leftover cooked collard greens, drained if resting in liquid
1 leftover spicy smoked sausage
Leftover crumbs from a bag of Ghost Pepper potato chips from Trader Joe's

*NOTES

Orrechiette is a small pasta shape, and I happened to have a half-box of it. Its name translates to “little ears” in Italian, and it can easily be swapped out for another small shape of pasta, such as elbows or rotini—essentially, you want a shape that will grab hold of your delicious cheese sauce. I've noticed that the popular pasta shapes have been in scarce supply, which makes this a fun time to try new ones!

I had cheddar in abundance in my deli drawer, but of course any cheese that melts well would work. Most of the time, I gather up all the scraps and bits and throw them in—it's why my mac and cheese is never the same twice.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Melt butter, cook flour until bubbly, add milk and whisk until smooth. Melt American cheese into the sauce and whisk until smooth. Add grated cheddar, whisk until smooth.
3. Use immersion blender to emulsify cheese into an ultra-smooth mixture. Season with smoked black pepper.
4. Cut smoked sausage into bite sized pieces, cook in small hot skillet to crisp up the edges of the sausage.
5. Cook pasta to “early al dente” stage. It will soften further in the oven with the cheese sauce. Add finished pasta to cheese sauce and stir to coat, and then fold in cooked collard greens until evenly combined.
6. Layer mac & cheese in individual ramekins or in a 1.5 quart casserole dish with the crispy sausage bits, top with crushed potato chip crumbs. Bake at 350° F for 30 minutes, or until cheese is bubbly and top is lightly browned with crisp edges.