

# Shortcut Macaroni and Cheese

Creamy, and beautifully browned and crunchy on top; not at all like the stuff from a box.

TIME About 1 hour,  
mostly unattended  
MAKES 4 to 6 servings

6 tablespoons ( $\frac{3}{4}$  stick)  
butter, softened

Salt

2½ cups milk

2 bay leaves

1 pound rigatoni, elbow,  
or other cut pasta

3 tablespoons all-purpose  
flour

6 ounces sharp cheddar  
cheese, grated (about 1½  
cups)

Freshly ground black  
pepper

½ cup freshly grated  
Parmesan cheese

½ cup bread crumbs,  
preferably fresh

**1** Heat the oven to 400°F and grease a 9 x 13-inch baking pan with 2 tablespoons of the butter. Bring a stockpot of water to a boil and salt it.

**2** Put the milk and the bay leaves in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. When small bubbles appear along the sides of the pan, after about 5 minutes, turn off the heat and let the milk sit.

**3** When the water boils, cook the pasta to the point where it is just becoming tender but is still quite underdone and firm in the center. Start tasting after 3 minutes. Drain the pasta and rinse it quickly in cold water to stop the cooking.

**4** Fish the bay leaves out of the milk. Spread a third of the pasta evenly in the prepared baking dish. Sprinkle it with half of the flour (using your hands is easiest), dot with half of the remaining butter, cover with ½ cup of the cheddar, and sprinkle with salt and pepper.

**5** Repeat this process once more. Finally, spread out the last of the pasta and top with the remaining cheddar and the Parmesan; sprinkle with the bread crumbs. Pour the heated milk over all. Bake until bubbling and browned on top, 30 to 40 minutes. Serve immediately.

*Look for steam and small bubbles just forming around the edge.*



**SCALDING MILK** You want to heat it almost but not quite to boiling. Adding herbs or spices infuses the milk—and whatever you use it for—with wonderful flavor.

*When you bite or break into the noodle, the center will be white and chalky.*



**UNDERCOOKED NOODLES FOR BAKING** You wouldn't want to eat pasta this underdone, but it's going to finish cooking in the oven.