

Beethoven's Macaroni & Cheese
{Traditional Austrian Spaetzle
with Cheese and Sweet Carmelized Onions}

This traditional Austrian dish has three main steps. You can make it with kids (or just yourself!) either the *really easy* way or also the easy-and-fun homemade way. Essentially, the dish is cooked macaroni or spaetzle (dumplings) topped with butter and cheese and baked in a 400 degree oven for 20 minutes. While the macaroni or spaetzle cooks, you caramelize onions (1 or 2 big ones) by cooking them on high for 1 minute and low for 19 minutes. "Guten Appetit," as they say in Austria. (Your home will smell incredible as it cooks!) Here's the recipe.

1. Either buy or make the pasta or dumplings. If you want to purchase them, buy either 10 ounces of macaroni or dried spaetzle (available at import stores like Costplus). If you buy them pre-made, cook according to the package's directions till done. If you want to make your own spaetzle, it's really easy and fun! Here's the recipe.

Mix together in a bowl 3 cups of flour, 4 beaten eggs (free range if possible—it makes a big difference), 1 tsp. salt, and 1 cup of milk (whole milk best). Dough will be sticky.

Use either a spaetzle maker (they sell them at kitchen stores like Sur le Table for only \$15) or a colander with large holes (minimum 1/4 inch holes), press the noodles into a big pot of boiling water (about 1/2 cup at a time). Once all the dough is pressed into the pot, cook for additional 2 minutes. Drain noodles in a colander and then transfer them gently to a large bowl of ice water. Stir till the ice melts and drain the spaetzle.

2, Whether you purchase store-bought noodles or make your own, once they are cooked (and cooled if you made them yourself), put them in a large bowl and stir together with 1 Tablespoon of olive (or peanut oil). Add freshly ground pepper and salt to taste.

3. Oil a 9x13 casserole pan, add the noodles/spaetzle, and dot the pasta/spaetzle with 1-2 tablespoons of butter cut into small pieces.
(If you like mushrooms, they are fantastic in this dish. Add at this point.)

4. Spread anywhere from 5 to 8 ounces of grated cheese over the top of the noodles and bake at 400 for 20 minutes. Beethoven is supposed to have liked Parmesan cheese on his macaroni and cheese, but the classic Austria recipe uses Gruyere, Emmentaler, or Appenzeller cheese. (American Parmesan is somewhat mild for this dish.)

5. While the noodles are baking, put either 1 or 2 diced onions in a skillet and cook on high heat till softened for 1 minute. (I always use 2 onions, preferably sweet onions like Vidalias or Hawai'ian sweet onions.) Reduce heat and cook until caramelized, which takes the rest of the time till the noodles are cooked. When the noodles are done, scatter the caramelized (now sweet) onions on top of the noodles and serve.

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