

SMOKED GOUDA MAC + CHEESE POPPERS

INGREDIENTS

For the Mac and Cheese Balls

2 cups cooked ditalini paste (very small tubes, smaller than macaroni)
2 cups shredded smoked gouda cheese
1 cup shredded american cheese
1 tablespoon butter
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 cup milk
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
Salt and pepper to taste

For the coating

1 egg, beaten
1 cup breadcrumbs (preferably panko)
1/2 cup flour

For frying and serving

Vegetable oil for frying (or use a deep fryer)
Dipping sauce of your choice
finely cut scallion, optional garnish

DIRECTIONS

Start by cooking the elbow macaroni (or your preferred pasta) according to the package directions. Be sure not to overcook the pasta, as it will continue to cook when combined with the cheese sauce. Once cooked, drain the pasta and set it aside to cool.

In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Once melted, add the flour and whisk it together with the butter. Continue to whisk for about 1-2 minutes to create a smooth roux. This will help thicken the sauce and give it a velvety texture. Gradually add the milk to the roux, whisking constantly to prevent lumps from forming. Cook the mixture over medium heat, whisking frequently, until it thickens slightly and coats the back of a spoon. This should take about 3-5 minutes. Once the sauce has thickened, reduce the heat to low and stir in the shredded gouda cheese and american cheese. Stir until the cheeses are fully melted and the sauce is smooth. Season with garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and pepper to taste.

Add the cooked macaroni to the cheese sauce and stir gently to coat the pasta evenly. Let the mixture cool for about 10-15 minutes so that it becomes firmer and easier to work with. Ideally, cool completely overnight, but you can continue when the mac and cheese is at room temperature.

Once the mac and cheese mixture has cooled, using a tablespoon portioning scoop to scoop out portions of the mixture and roll them into balls about 1-2 inches in diameter. You should be able to make around 15-18 balls, depending on the size. Chill again while you set up your frying station.

To coat the mac and cheese balls, set up a breading station with three bowls: flour, eggs, then breadcrumbs. Dip each mac and cheese ball first into the flour, then into the beaten egg, and finally into the breadcrumbs, making sure to coat each ball evenly. Set the coated balls aside on a plate or tray. In a large frying pan or deep fryer, heat about 2-3 inches of vegetable oil over medium-high heat. The oil should be hot but not smoking. You can test the temperature by dropping a few flakes of panko into the oil—if it sizzles immediately, the oil is ready for frying.

Carefully add the mac and cheese balls to the hot oil in batches, making sure not to overcrowd the pan. Fry the balls for about 3-4 minutes, turning them occasionally to ensure they are golden brown and crispy on all sides. Once the balls are fully cooked, remove them from the oil using a slotted spoon and drain them on a paper towel-lined plate. Serve immediately.