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Alpine Macaroni and Appenzeller with Crème Fraîche

Serves 4

Nutty and slightly spicy, Appenzeller is one of the classic cheeses for a luscious Swiss fondue, along with Emmenthal and Gruyère; they are all good cheeses to use in this dish. From across the French border, Comté is also a delicious choice.

Accompany the dish with a light and leafy green salad: young mâche, baby lettuces, chopped chives, and chervil if you've any around; otherwise, toss in a little chopped parsley. For dessert, I'd slice oranges and serve them dusted with sugar and cinnamon if it is winter, or for summer, melon chunks – pink watermelon, pale green honeydew, and sunset-hued cantaloupe – sprinkled with lime juice and zest and some fresh mint.

12 ounces smallish macaroni, such as elbows or pennette
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 shallot, chopped
10 to 12 ounces Appenzeller, Emmenthal, Gruyère, or Comté cheese, shredded
4 ounces crème fraîche, or as desired
A grating of fresh nutmeg
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 to 3 tablespoons unsalted butter

Cook the pasta in a large pot of rapidly boiling salted water until it is al dente. Drain, and reserve about 1 cup of the cooking liquid.

Return the hot pasta to the pan immediately, and toss with the garlic, shallot, shredded cheese sprinkled evenly over the top, crème fraîche, nutmeg, salt and pepper, and butter. Ladle in about 1/4 cup of the cooking liquid and toss gently. If the cheese doesn't melt right away, turn the heat to low for a few moments; the cooking liquid should help produce a light, saucy coating of cheese for the pasta. If it seems dry, ladle in a bit more of the liquid.