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Apple & Bacon Mac 'n Cheese

Serves about 6

Both savory and slightly sweet, this mac and cheese is always a table pleaser. The cooked apples pair well with the salty bacon, and are both balanced with the creamy, cheesy noodles! It makes a great meal for a hungry crowd - don't expect any leftovers.

Ingredients:

16 ounces macaroni (or your favorite pasta)	2-1/2 cups milk
6 slices bacon	6 ounces white cheddar, grated
1 small onion, diced	8 ounces cream cheese, softened
2 tablespoons flour	2 apples, peeled and thinly sliced
1-1/2 teaspoons Kosher salt	2 tablespoons butter
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper	2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 teaspoon dry ground mustard	1/4 cup Parmesan cheese

Directions:

1. Cook the macaroni (or pasta) according to the package instructions, drain and set aside.
2. In a large Dutch oven or sauté pan, cook the bacon until crispy. Remove the bacon, drain on a paper towel-lined plate, then crumble when cooled.
3. Sauté the onion in the rendered bacon fat until translucent.
4. Sprinkle the cooked onions with the flour, and stir until coated. Season with the salt, pepper, and ground mustard.
5. Add the milk to the onions, and bring to a simmer. Gradually add the cheddar cheese and cream cheese while stirring until the cheeses have melted and the sauce is smooth.
6. Meanwhile, cook the apple slices in a sauce pan or skillet with the butter and brown sugar until the apples are softened and slightly caramelized.
7. Mix the cooked macaroni (or pasta), half of the crumbled bacon, and the cooked apple slices into the sauce. Stir until well combined.
8. Pour the macaroni and cheese mixture into a large casserole dish. Sprinkle the Parmesan cheese on top of the dish, and then sprinkle with the remaining bacon crumbles.
9. Cover loosely with foil, and bake for 25 minutes, or until bubbly.