

MACARONI AND CHEESE CASSEROLES USING BOXED MIXES

Boxed mixes can be a great economical starting point for casseroles that are healthier and more filling than just the mix alone. Here are a few that provide a meal for 4 at a very reasonable cost. Most recipes can use a variety of ingredients. See the options at the end of each recipe. If you like your food a bit spicy, add a little Hot pepper or even a bit of chopped jalapeno to the dish.

BROCCOLI, HAM AND MACARONI CASSEROLE

INGREDIENTS

- 25 oz. box macaroni and cheese (prepared as directed)
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup shredded Cheese (any variety)
- 3 tbsp. melted butter or margarine
- 4 oz. diced ham
- 1 cup cottage cheese
- 2 cups frozen or fresh cooked Broccoli
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix the Bread crumbs with the melted butter or margarine, add 1/2 teaspoon pepper and 1/4 cup shredded cheese. Set this aside for topping the casserole.
2. Prepare the Macaroni and cheese according to package directions. If you don't have milk, just use additional water. (The Cottage Cheese will add creaminess).
3. Add the diced ham, cottage cheese and broccoli. Pour into a casserole or 8 X 8 baking pan. Top with bread crumbs
4. Bake for 20 minutes at 375 degrees, or until hot.

If you don't have Ham available, you can substitute diced chicken, or even 2 diced hot dogs, or 2 cooked and chopped Italian sausages.

No Broccoli? You can add a box of frozen spinach. Or if you have canned green beans or peas, they would be equally good.

No cottage cheese – 1 cup of any shredded cheese like mozzarella would work.

Watch your grocery for sales where you can often buy bricks of mozzarella and other cheeses at reduced prices. If you don't open the package it will stay fresh for 2 months.

ONE POT SAUSAGE TOMATO PASTA

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp. olive oil

1/2 lb. sausage

14 oz. can petite diced tomatoes with garlic & olive oil (or use diced tomatoes)

1 box Macaroni Cheese mix

1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese (bottled is fine)

1 tsp Italian seasoning, OR seasoned salt and 1 teaspoon oregano if available.

DIRECTIONS

1. In large Dutch oven or pot with a lid over medium heat, add the oil. Once hot, add the sausage, break it up with a spatula, and cook until browned.
2. Add 2 cups of water to the sausage and bring to simmer.
3. Add the macaroni from the box and cook until tender. If needed, add more water 1/4 cup at a time. A
4. Add the tomatoes and cook until the sauce thickens a little
5. Add cheese mix, parmesan cheeses and the Italian seasoning. Stir well, if mix is not thick cook for 1 or 2 additional minutes
6. Serve

No Sausage? If you have a fresh or frozen chicken breast, or a can of chicken substitute that. Cook any raw chicken in the cooking oil and follow the recipe once it is browned. If using canned chicken, reduce the water by 1/2 cup. Add the chicken and boxed macaroni to the water and cook until the macaroni is tender, then proceed with the recipe.

If you like a spicier pasta you can use hot Italian sausage or a tomato product like Rotel. If you are a fan of diced peppers, either sweet or hot, you can add them to any of these recipes.



TUNA PASTA

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1/4 yellow onion, diced
- 1 – 15 ounce box Macaroni and cheese (USE ONLY THE MACARONI)
- 1 1/2 cups milk OR 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 5 oz. can tuna, drained
- 12 oz. bag frozen mixed vegetables or 1 can drained mixed vegetables
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt

DIRECTIONS

1. Boil the pasta according to the package instructions, adding one additional cup of water.
2. Once the pasta is tender, save 1/2 cup of the water the pasta was cooking in and set it to the side. Drain the remaining water. Save the package of cheese sauce. Use for vegetables another day.)
3. To a large skillet over medium heat, add the oil.
4. Once hot, add the onion and frozen vegetables and cook for 2-3 minutes.
5. Stir in the flour, then slowly stir in the milk (or soup) and pasta water. Once simmering (not boiling), add the tuna and seasonings and cook until warmed through.

You can use any simple pasta to make this recipe, Penne, Orzo, Rigatoni, or Macaroni. Store brand canned soups are generally less expensive than name brand. Any variety of cream soup can be used: chicken, mushroom or celery. Canned or frozen peas are a good substitute for mixed vegetables.

CHUCK WAGON MAC AND BEEF

INGREDIENTS

- 1 box macaroni and cheese prepared according to package directions
- 1/2 pound ground beef
- 1 chopped onion
- 1 can corn
- 1 small can tomato sauce

1. Prepare the macaroni and cheese.
2. Brown the ground beef and onion in a skillet.
3. Add the prepared macaroni and Cheese, tomato sauce and corn to the hamburger and ground beef and heat until all ingredients are hot.
4. Serve.

No ground beef? You could try chopped turkey sausage. A can of chili added to the mac and cheese can replace the hamburger and the beef. Chili seasoning will make this dish a Chili Mac.

Simple measuring tools. It's pretty easy to measure using cans and spoons

- An 8 ounce can of anything (often tomato sauce) is one cup. Wash and clean any 8 ounce can and you have a one cup measure. Fill the can half way and you have $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. Most of the individual serving applesauce cups are also $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. When you fill the applesauce cup $\frac{1}{2}$ way you get $\frac{1}{4}$ cup.
- Fill the tomato sauce can a little less than half full for ingredients that call for $\frac{1}{3}$ cup, and a little over half full will be $\frac{2}{3}$ cup.
- A 12 ounce soup can is about 1 and $\frac{1}{2}$ cups.
- A soup spoon is about 1 Tablespoon (not heaping full), and a regular teaspoon is about 1 teaspoon (not heaping full). There are 3 teaspoons in a tablespoon.

Recipes use directions that might sound confusing. Here are a few:

“Cream” together - often a recipe for a cookie, quick bread or cake will say “cream together” sugar and butter. Creaming is mixing until there are no lumps.

“Dice” is used to describe cutting large items into pieces around $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in size. Onions are diced in many recipes

Cooking might ask you to simmer, or boil or reduce

“Simmer” – hot enough so that there are small bubbles around the edge.

“Boil” – bubbles all over. Try to keep the heat low enough that the bubbles don't escape over the sides of the pot.

“Reduce” – this means you might cook until some of the liquid evaporates.

“Flip” – just means to turn the item over.

Two seasonings to provide flavor: Lawry's Seasoned Salt or Greek Seasoning: salt, pepper, garlic and oregano in one product