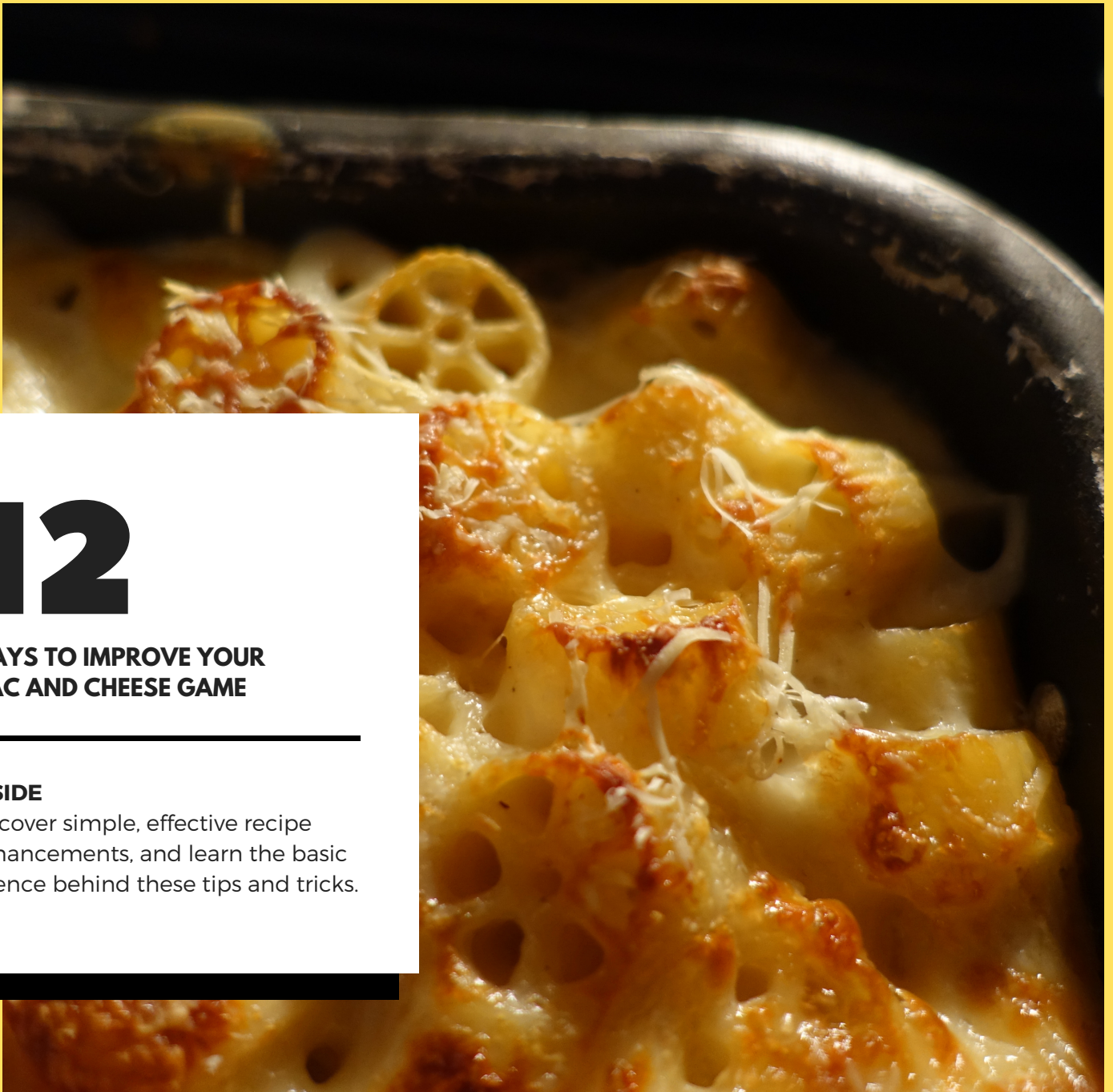


JULY 14

is National Mac & Cheese Day



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**WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR
MAC AND CHEESE GAME**

INSIDE

Discover simple, effective recipe enhancements, and learn the basic science behind these tips and tricks.



MAKE THINGS GRATE

GRATE YOUR OWN CHEESES FOR THE BEST FLAVOR AND TEXTURE

AVOID PACKAGED SHREDS

Packaged shredded cheese can contain additives to prevent clumping. Ideally formulated for taco and salad applications, these non-stick additives can cause uneven melting and a grainy texture. Grate your own curated cheese blend for the best results.

#doyouevenDIY

PRACTICE TEAM BUILDING

To strike a balance of flavor and smoothness, choose a cooperative team of 2-3 cheeses.

BASE CHEESES

Younger cheddar, fontina, or gruyere cheeses melt smoothly, due to their high moisture content. Then there's American, the process cheese formulated for melting. These milder flavors provide an agreeable base to mix and mingle with other varieties.

COMPLEMENTARY CHEESES

Go-with-the-flow flavors: Gouda, Havarti, Parmesan are highly compatible with melty base cheeses. For more adventurous tastes, Maytag blue and Raclette add creamy complexity.

A NOTE ON AGED CHEESES

The aging process removes moisture, resulting in a drier, fattier, and more flavorful cheese. It also compacts proteins, making some aged cheeses harder to melt. The next section will cover methods for achieving smooth and creamy sauce magic.



CONTROL YOUR EMULSIONS

TRY ANY OR ALL OF THESE INGREDIENTS BECAUSE SCIENCE

CLASSIC: CREAM CHEESE

As a base cheese or a complementary co-star, cream cheese is up for the task. Use a whisk or immersion blender to smoothly blend cubed cream cheese into heated liquids. Remember to remove liquid mixtures from heat *before adding cheeses* to avoid curdling or separating. Try this highly-rated [recipe](#) which improves a classic-style recipe with the addition of cream cheese.

FRENCH: CRÈME FRAÎCHE

Meet sour cream's rich, less fickle French cousin. Crème fraîche is higher in fat but lower in protein content, making it more stable when heated. Use it to thicken and flavor sauces without risk of curdling or separating. Learn more about crème fraîche [here](#).

MODERN: SODIUM CITRATE

Evenly melted cheese is a small molecular miracle. Calcium ions facilitate the tightly bonded proteins in hard-to-melt cheeses. Sodium citrate, an emulsifying salt, works by exchanging sodium ions with calcium ions. When heated in a liquid, sodium citrate loosens these clingy protein bonds, resulting in an [improved cheesy emulsion](#). You can buy this modernist cooking ingredient online.

EXPERIMENTAL: CHEESE DIP

This dirty shortcut delivers processed cheese with additional flavors. Cheese dip generally contains cheese with an emulsifying ingredient. Experiment with adding leftover spoonfuls of store-bought or homemade dip to put a new spin on your favorite recipes.

MINIMALIST: MILK & STARCH

This ridiculously quick recipe requires only 3 ingredients and 10 minutes. To make it even easier, these ingredients are easy to find, if not already in your kitchen. The sauce combines cheese with evaporated milk, starch, and liquid.

Here's how these ingredients work:

Cooking the pasta in just enough water concentrates the starch from the pasta. The remaining starchy liquid helps form the cheese sauce emulsion. Using evaporated milk instead of regular milk further stabilizes your liquid dairy situation. A satisfyingly smooth sauce is quickly achieved in concert with starchy pasta water and cheese. Prepare to be dazzled by this moment.

Please note that even unsweetened evaporated milk is still a touch sweet. Choose a flavorful cheese, such as sharp (not aged) cheddar, to balance out the sweetness. I tried this recipe with some Emmentaler I already had, which is very mild, and the sauce was too bland and too sweet at the same time. True, sad story. But hey, that's showbiz, baby.

Now that you know the way to Flavor Town, check out the full recipe [here](#).

GET IN SHAPE

A PASTA APPLICATION GUIDE.

ELBOWS ON OR OFF THE TABLE?

Sure, the name of the dish is 'macaroni and cheese'. But, many cooks opt for shapes other than elbow macaroni. Here are some tips on selecting the best shapes for your recipe applications.

Baked pastas, also known as pasta al forno, work best with short shapes with hollow middles, twists, or scoops to hold sauces.

Penne, shells, or rigatoni are good examples of bake-worthy shapes. Check out the wagon wheels on the cover of this magazine, an often overlooked short shape with a hollow middle.

Meat or chunky vegetable sauces need tubular or deeply scooped shapes to hold everything together. Rigatoni, penne or orecchiette are shaped to receive chunky sauces.

Creamy cheese sauces like curvy, hollow, scoopable shapes. For stovetop recipes, you can count on classic elbow macaroni, along with shells, spirals, cavatappi, or farfalle shapes.

My personal tip: SIZE matters. The fancy tubular shapes can become fork-floppy and rebellious. If you prefer a spoonable mac and cheese, go even smaller, like mini farfalle or mini shells.

For more ideas, check out this helpful pasta [guide](#) from DeLallo.



CONTAIN YOURSELF

MAKE YOUR PRESENTATION EVERYTHING WITH THESE ESSENTIAL KITCHEN-TO-TABLE DETAILS

DEPTH & SURFACE AREA

Do you prefer a densely baked casserole, or a soupier stovetop recipe? This, sports fans, is where your cookware comes into play. A long and shallow baking dish will provide a thinner layer of pasta and more surface area for crispy baked cheese toppings. Alternatively, filling a smaller baking dish to the top will yield a saucier casserole. For stovetop chefs, your [choice of cookware](#) impacts heat distribution and cooking time.

BAKED VS STOVETOP

For baked dishes, a casserole dish or cast iron skillet are attractive oven-to-table serving solutions. For stovetop noodles, however, your trusted-but-wonky saucepan may not present as well. Transfer it into a soup tureen, glass dish, or serving bowl. Consider investing in one of these [top-rated Dutch ovens](#) for colorful presentation and heat retention.

FAMILY STYLE

"Does this pan have the small batch mountain goat mushroom cheese, or no?" When there are multiple food restrictions among guests, preparing several smaller serving dishes can accommodate everyone's needs. The smaller size also makes it easier for passing around the table, family style. Check out these [assorted Le Creuset baking dishes](#) that make it easy to distinguish between meatless, gluten-free, and mushroom-less versions.

INDIVIDUAL PORTIONS

Ramekins or [mini skillets](#) are perfect for personalized presentation. Serving a brunch buffet? Consider mismatched ramekins or [vintage-style custard cups](#). Choose from a variety of oven-safe designs for picture-perfect portions..

