



Modern Cauliflower Gratin

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

To create a cauliflower gratin that was rich and flavorful without the heft, we relied on cauliflower’s natural ability to become an ultracreamy puree, using it as a sauce to bind the florets together. To ensure that we had enough cauliflower to use in two ways, we used two heads. We removed the cores and stems and steamed these until soft; we then blended them to make the sauce. We cut the florets into slabs, which made for a more compact casserole and helped them cook more evenly. For a streamlined, efficient cooking setup, we placed the cauliflower cores and stems in water in the bottom of a Dutch oven and set our steamer basket filled with florets right on top. Butter and Parmesan (plus a little cornstarch) gave the sauce a richer flavor and texture without making it too heavy, and a few pantry spices lent some complexity. Tossing the florets in the sauce before placing them in the dish ensured that they were completely coated. Topping the gratin with Parmesan and panko gave it savory crunch, and a final garnish of minced chives added color.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 heads cauliflower (2 pounds each)
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs

INSTRUCTIONS

When buying cauliflower, look for heads without many leaves. Alternatively, if your cauliflower does have a lot of leaves, buy slightly larger heads—about 2 1/4 pounds each. This recipe can be halved to serve 4 to 6; cook the cauliflower in a large saucepan and bake the gratin in an 8-inch square baking dish.

SERVES 8 TO 10

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| <p>2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)</p> <p>Salt and pepper</p> <p>½ teaspoon dry mustard</p> <p>⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg</p> <p>Pinch cayenne pepper</p> <p>1 teaspoon cornstarch dissolved in 1 teaspoon water</p> <p>1 tablespoon minced fresh chives</p> | <p>1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees.</p> <p>2. Pull off outer leaves of 1 head of cauliflower and trim stem. Using paring knife, cut around core to remove; halve core lengthwise and slice thin crosswise. Slice head into 1/2-inch-thick slabs. Cut stems from slabs to create florets that are about 1 1/2 inches tall; slice stems thin and reserve along with sliced core. Transfer florets to bowl, including any small pieces that may have been created during trimming, and set aside. Repeat with remaining head of cauliflower. (After trimming you should have about 3 cups of sliced stems and cores and 12 cups of florets.)</p> <p>3. Combine sliced stems and cores, 2 cups florets, 3 cups water, and 6 tablespoons butter in Dutch oven and bring to boil over high heat. Place remaining florets in steamer basket (do not rinse bowl). Once mixture is boiling, place steamer basket in pot, cover, and reduce heat to medium. Steam florets in basket until translucent and stem ends can be easily pierced with paring knife, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove steamer basket and drain florets. Re-cover pot, reduce heat to low, and continue to cook stem mixture until very soft, about 10 minutes longer. Transfer drained florets to now-empty bowl.</p> <p>4. While cauliflower is cooking, melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add panko and cook, stirring frequently, until golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to bowl and let cool. Once cool, add 1/2 cup Parmesan and toss to combine.</p> <p>5. Transfer stem mixture and cooking liquid to blender and add 2 teaspoons salt, 1/2 teaspoon pepper, mustard, nutmeg, cayenne, and remaining 1/2 cup Parmesan. Process until smooth and velvety, about 1 minute (puree should be pourable; adjust consistency with additional water as needed). With blender running, add cornstarch slurry. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Pour puree over cauliflower florets and toss gently to evenly</p> |
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coat. Transfer mixture to 13 by 9-inch baking dish (it will be quite loose) and smooth top with spatula.

6. Scatter bread-crumble mixture evenly over top. Transfer dish to oven and bake until sauce bubbles around edges, 13 to 15 minutes. Let stand for 20 to 25 minutes. Sprinkle with chives and serve.

TO MAKE AHEAD: Follow recipe through step 5, refrigerating gratin and bread-crumble mixture separately for up to 24 hours. To serve, assemble and bake gratin as directed in step 6, increasing baking time by 13 to 15 minutes.