

Creamy Baked Four-Cheese Pasta

Serves 4 to 6

To streamline the process, prepare the bread-crumb topping and shred, crumble, and grate the cheeses while you wait for the pasta water to boil.

2 slices high-quality white sandwich bread, torn into quarters
1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (about 1/2 cup)
Table salt and ground black pepper
4 ounces Italian fontina cheese, rind removed, shredded (about 1 cup)
3 ounces Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled (about 3/4 cup)
1 ounce Pecorino-Romano cheese, grated (about 1/2 cup)
1 pound penne
2 teaspoons unsalted butter
2 teaspoons unbleached all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cup heavy cream

1. Pulse the bread in a food processor to coarse crumbs, about 10 to 15 pulses. Transfer to a small bowl. Stir in 1/4 cup of the Parmesan, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper; set aside.
2. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 500 degrees.
3. Bring 4 quarts water to a boil in a large pot. combine the remaining 1/4 cup Parmesan and the fontina, Gorgonzola, and Pecorino Romano cheeses in a large bowl; set aside. Add 1 tablespoon salt and the pasta to the boiling water and cook, stirring often.
4. While the pasta is cooking, melt the butter in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Whisk in the flour until no lumps remain, about 30 seconds. gradually whisk in the cream, increase the heat to medium, and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally; reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 1 minute longer. Stir 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper; cover and set aside.
5. When the pasta is just shy of al dente, drain it, leaving it slightly wet. Add the pasta to the bowl with the cheeses; immediately pour the cream mixture over, then cover the bowl and let stand for 3 minutes. Uncover the bowl and stir with a rubber spatula, scrapping the bottom of the bowl until the cheeses are melted and the mixture is thoroughly combined.
6. Transfer the pasta to a 13 by 9-inch baking dish, then sprinkle evenly with the reserved bread crumbs, pressing down lightly. Bake until the topping is golden brown, about 7 minutes. Serve immediately.