

A man with a beard and a dark shirt is focused on preparing a dish. He is pouring sesame seeds from a small glass jar into a white bowl with a blue floral pattern. The bowl contains a dark, saucy dish topped with green onions. He is wearing a patterned apron. The background is a brick wall with a framed piece of art. The lighting is warm and focused on the man and his work.

SOUTHERN » COOKING GLOBAL « FLAVORS

KENNY GILBERT and **Nan Kavanaugh**

Foreword by **ALEXANDER SMALLS**

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

Gilbert's BBQ Chicken with Anna's Mac & Cheese

When my wife, Anna, and I opened our first restaurant together, Gilbert's Underground Kitchen, we knew we had to have mac & cheese on the menu. People loved it, but Anna always felt it was missing something. One day I watched her make her mac & cheese. She added a cheese combination similar to my pimento cheese—and a new variation was born.

INGREDIENTS

SERVES 6

FOR THE BBQ SAUCE

Makes 4 cups

- 2 cups ketchup
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup molasses
- Juice of 3 lemons (¼ cup)
- Juice of 1 navel orange (¼ cup)
- ¼ cup packed light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons Chef Kenny's Raging Cajun Spice, or other Cajun seasoning
- 1 tablespoon Chef Kenny's Fried Chicken Seasoning, or other poultry seasoning
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt

FOR THE BBQ CHICKEN

- ½ cup corn oil
- ¼ cup Chef Kenny's Fried Chicken Seasoning, or other poultry seasoning
- ¼ cup Chef Kenny's Raging Cajun Spice, or other Cajun seasoning
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 12 jumbo chicken legs
- 1 cup BBQ Sauce (see above)

FOR THE MAC & CHEESE

For the Black Pepper Cheese Sauce

Makes 6 cups

- 3 cups half-and-half
- 1 cup lager
- 2 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- ½ cup fried shallots, preferably Maesri
- ½ cup fried garlic, preferably Maesri

- 4 ounces (½ block) cream cheese
- 2 ounces Colby Jack cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- 2 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- 2 ounces pepper Jack cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- 2 ounces sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- ¼ teaspoon xanthan gum

For the Pimento Cheese

Makes 2½ cups

- ½ cup cottage cheese
- 4 ounces (½ block) cream cheese
- 2 ounces sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- 2 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- ¼ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup Chef Kenny's South Carolina Mustard BBQ Sauce or Sweet Baby Ray's Golden Mustard Barbecue Sauce
- 2 tablespoons Chef Kenny's Raging Cajun Spice, or other Cajun seasoning
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

For the Gratin

- Kosher Salt
- 1 pound medium pasta shells
- 4 cups Black Pepper Cheese Sauce, warmed (see left)
- 2 cups Pimento Cheese (see above)
- 4 ounces sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (1 cup)
- 4 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (1 cup)
- 4 ounces pepper Jack cheese, shredded (1 cup)

FOR THE BUILD

- Sliced scallions, for garnish
- Chef Kenny's Raging Cajun Spice, or other Cajun seasoning for garnish

DIRECTIONS

Make the BBQ Sauce

In a large bowl, whisk together the ketchup, apple cider vinegar, molasses, lemon juice, orange juice, brown sugar, Cajun spice blend, chicken seasoning, cinnamon, and salt. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use. (Leftover sauce can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.)

Make the Chicken

1. Whisk the oil, chicken and Cajun seasonings, lemon juice, and salt in a large bowl.
 2. Put the chicken legs in the bowl with the marinade and toss to thoroughly coat. Marinate the chicken, covered in the refrigerator, for a minimum of 2 hours and up to 12 hours.
 3. Preheat a smoker or the oven to 350°F.
 4. Place the chicken legs directly on the smoker or cook them on a sheet pan in the oven. Cook for 40 minutes, or until a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the leg reaches 155°F.
 5. Baste the chicken with the barbecue sauce. Cook the chicken 25 to 30 minutes longer, to an internal temperature of 165°F. If using a smoker, transfer the smoked chicken to a sheet pan. Cover the chicken with foil to keep warm.
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Make the Mac & Cheese

Make the Black Pepper Cheese Sauce

1. Combine the half-and-half, lager, pepper, and salt in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil on medium-high heat.
2. Put the fried shallots, fried garlic, cream cheese, Colby Jack, Monterey Jack, pepper Jack, Cheddar, and xanthan gum in another medium saucepan.
3. Pour the half-and-half mixture over the cheese blend and allow the cheese to melt naturally for 3 to 5 minutes.
4. Over low heat, puree the cheese mixture with a handheld stick blender until smooth and warm throughout. Rewarm before assembling the mac & cheese.

Make the Pimento Cheese

1. Put the cottage cheese, cream cheese, Cheddar, Monterey Jack, sour cream, mustard barbecue sauce, Cajun spice blend, and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer with the paddle attachment (or you can combine the ingredients in a large bowl and mix with a spoon).
2. Mix on low speed for 30 seconds, then increase the speed to medium and mix for 1 minute, until thoroughly combined. Transfer to a bowl, cover, and refrigerate until ready to use.

Make the Gratin

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook for 8 to 11 minutes, until just under al dente, stirring occasionally.
2. Drain the pasta and return it to the pot along with the rewarmed cheese sauce and the pimento cheese.



3. Cook on low to medium heat, stirring until the pimento cheese melts. Transfer the cheesy pasta to a large casserole. Preheat the broiler.
4. Toss together the cheddar, Monterey Jack, and pepper Jack in a medium bowl. Sprinkle the cheese blend over the pasta.
5. Place the casserole under the broiler for 1 to 2 minutes, or until the cheese is bubbling and golden brown.

The Build

1. Place a large scoop of mac & cheese in the center of a dinner plate. Sprinkle scallions over the mac & cheese. Place 2 chicken legs to one side of the mac & cheese.
2. Sprinkle a dash of Cajun spice over the chicken. Plate the remaining servings.