

Hawaiian Mac Salad

BY IAN FUJIMOTO | @IANKYO

When I was a kid growing up in an Asian American household, there was a point in time where I felt different, and not in a good way. Usually, it was around the holidays, when all the other kids at school were talking about how their dad made the best turkey or how their mom had the best stuffing, that they couldn't wait to dig into every year. I didn't have that. Sure, we had turkey and mashed potatoes and a couple other staple things, but they were more of just filler to the rest of the food I grew up around during the holidays.

My family is Japanese, with some born and raised in Hawai'i. That means instead of stuffing, we had dry saimin, and instead of that all-American salad covered in ranch, we had mac salad. It was something different and unique to us. It wasn't until I was older that I realized it was unique to an entire group of people.

It also wasn't until I was older that I truly appreciated those meals and the food at the table, because that food embodied who I am, where my family has come from, and these experiences they've had along the way. Now I'm proud of it: proud of the food I make and the food I eat, and I'll jump at any opportunity to share it with someone new. Not just because I love it, but because it reminds me of home.

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SERVES: 3-4

INGREDIENTS

1 lb (454 g) macaroni
¼ tbsp rice vinegar or apple cider vinegar
1 sweet onion
1-2 carrot
4 stalks green onion
2 cups Hellmann's or Best Foods mayo
⅔ cup milk
2 tbsp sugar
Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste

Ingredients and recipe continue...

INSTRUCTIONS

01 Prep

1. The first thing we're going to do is bring a large pot of water to a boil. This is step one because it takes a hot minute for that much water to come to temperature.
2. While we're waiting, we can move on to our sweet onion. Start by cutting off the tip of your onion, making sure to leave the root intact. Carefully peel off the outer layers until you have a nice, clean onion ball.
3. From there, use a grater to grate the onion onto a plate or directly into a medium-sized bowl. Then set it aside for later.
4. Moving on to our carrots: carefully peel them, then use a julienne shredder if you have one. If not, a regular grater works just fine. Either way, grate your carrots onto your cutting board and set them aside.
5. The last bit of chopping we need to do is our green onions. Make sure you wash them thoroughly, including rinsing between the layers. Give them a good shake to dry them off because that's where all the dirt and critters like to hang out.
6. Then thinly slice your green onions.

02 Cooking

1. At this point, I'm hoping our water is boiling. If not, wait for it. I have faith in you both.
2. Once the water is boiling, generously salt it and add your uncooked macaroni.
3. Check the cooking instructions on your box, then set a timer for about one minute longer than the recommended cooking time. **This is probably the only time you'll ever hear me tell you to overcook your pasta**.
4. Cold pasta salads are one of the rare situations where slightly overcooking your pasta actually makes sense. As the pasta chills, it firms up, so cooking it a little past al dente helps prevent your macaroni salad from being unpleasantly firm once it's cold.
5. Once your pasta is finished cooking, drain it and give it a gentle shake to remove any excess water hiding inside the noodles.

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6. Transfer the cooked macaroni to a large bowl—one big enough that you feel comfortable mixing everything together.
7. Add your grated sweet onion and vinegar. I like using rice vinegar, but apple cider vinegar is more traditional. I love both, so this is really just personal preference.
8. Give everything a careful stir and let the macaroni cool while it absorbs all that vinegar and onion juice. While the pasta is cooling, we can make our dressing.

03 Dressing

1. Start with your Hellmann's or Best Foods mayonnaise. Same brand, different name depending on which side of the country you're on. And if you want a traditional Hawaiian-style mac salad, this is the mayonnaise to use. I don't make the rules. I just follow them.
2. Add your mayonnaise to a medium-sized bowl along with your whole milk, sugar, salt, and freshly cracked black pepper.
3. Mix everything together until thoroughly combined.
4. Once your macaroni has cooled down to where it's just warm to the touch, add in your dressing and gently fold everything together.
5. Give it a taste and adjust your salt and pepper as needed.
6. Once you're happy with the seasoning, add your green onions and carrots and fold everything together one final time.

04 Resting

1. Technically speaking, your mac salad is ready to eat right now. However, like any good pasta salad, it gets significantly better after it has had some time to sit.
2. I highly recommend making this the day before you plan to serve it so the macaroni has time to absorb all of those flavors.

05 Serving

1. When you're ready to serve, give your mac salad a good stir to fluff everything back up.
2. After sitting in the fridge overnight, it may be a little thicker than you'd like because everything is cold.

Ingredients and recipe continue...

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3. The easy fix is to add another couple tablespoons of mayonnaise and give it a good stir. This will loosen everything up and make it extra creamy again.
4. And one last pro tip - but not really a pro tip. It's just something I like to do: Add furikake. It is in no way, shape, or form traditional, but I think it tastes really good. And honestly, that's good enough for me.