


# WINNING RECIPE

## Bacon-Jalapeño Mac and Cheese

### Ingredients

- 1 pound cavatappi pasta
- 3/4 tsp table salt, divided (plus salt for cooking pasta)
- 1 pound bacon, cut into 1" pieces
- 1 cup Panko bread crumbs
- 3 fresh jalapeño chiles, stemmed and chopped fine (3/4 cup), divided
- 3 TB all-purpose flour
- 2 3/4 cups heavy cream
- 2 3/4 cups milk
- 12 oz cream cheese, cut into 1/2" cubes
- 1 pound sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (4 cups)
- 1 cup finely chopped jarred jalapeño chiles, plus 2 TB brine
- 8 scallions, sliced thin

### Method

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil in Dutch oven, add pasta and 1 TB salt, and cook, stirring often, until al dente; drain pasta and set aside.
2. Add bacon to now-empty pot and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until fat is rendered and bacon is lightly browned and crisp. Drain bacon, reserve bacon and fat separately (you should have about 6 TB of fat. If you son't have enough fat, make up the difference with oil).
3. Chop 1/4 of bacon fine and transfer to second bowl. Stir in panko, 1/4 cup fresh jalapeños, 1/4 cup reserved bacon fat, and 1/4 tsp of salt. Set aside.
4. Return remaining 2 TB reserved bacon fat to now-empty pot. Whisk in flour and cook for 1 minute over medium-high heat. Whisk in cream and milk; bring to boil; and cook until sauce is thickened, about 2 minutes. Whisk in cream cheese and cook, whisking constantly, until cream cheese is mostly melted (some small lumps may remain), about 1 minute.
5. Off heat, stir in cheddar, jarred jalapeños and brine, scallions, remaining bacon, remaining ½ cup fresh jalapeños, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt until cheese is just melted, about 30 seconds, then stir in cooked pasta. Transfer pasta mixture to 13 by 9-inch baking dish and spread into even layer.
6. Sprinkle panko mixture evenly over pasta mixture. set dish on foil-lined rimmed baking sheet and bake until filling is bubbling and topping is golden brown, 22-25 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes. Serve.