

CAULIFLOWER CHICKEN AND PENNE PASTA

INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1/2 head cauliflower, cut to 1 - 1 1/2 pieces
2 boneless-skinless chicken breasts, cut to 1 inch cubes
salt and pepper to taste
1/2 teaspoon herbs de Provence
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1/2 pound penne pasta (I used the multi-colored)
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons all purpose flour
1 1/2 cups milk
1 generous tablespoon pre-made pesto (optional)
2 1/2 cups grated cheese
(I used Swiss and Fontina, but any melty cheese from Cheddar to Emmenthaler will do)
1/2 cup grated parmesan

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350F. In a medium bowl, toss cauliflower pieces with 2 tablespoons olive oil, some salt and pepper, and evenly spread on a baking sheet. Roast in the oven for 15 minutes, tossing once about half way through, or until lightly browned. Set aside in a large mixing bowl. Keep the oven on. Meanwhile, set on a pot of salted water to boil. Once boiling, add the pasta and cook according to the direction, until al dente (8 minutes in my case, but that varies). Drain and add to the bowl with the cauliflower.

Season the cut chicken with salt, pepper, herbs de Provence and paprika. In a medium saucepan, heat the remaining olive oil to a shimmer. Add the chicken pieces and sauté until cooked through and golden, about 6-8 minutes. Add to the bowl with the cauliflower and the pasta. Return the pan to the heat and melt the butter. Once melted, add the flour and whisk to incorporate, making sure there are no lumps and to cook off the raw taste of the flour. Add the milk, slowly, whisking all the while as not to get lumps. Once you have a creamy sauce, add the pesto (if using) and finally 2 cups of the cheese, by handfuls to incorporate fully before adding the next handful. Once all the cheese is incorporated, add to the cauliflower, pasta and chicken mixture and gently fold together.

Spray an over-proof casserole dish with baking spray and then fill with the cauliflower chicken and pasta mixture. Sprinkle with the remaining 1/2 cup of cheese and the parmesan. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 35 minutes. Remove foil and return for an additional 10 minutes to brown the top. Let sit for a minimum of 10 minutes before serving (the cheese will be screaming hot).