

Creamy Cauliflower and Spinach Mac

adapted from The Food Matters by Mark Bittman

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for greasing the baking dish

Salt

2 1/2 cups vegetable or chicken stock or water

2 bay leaves

1 cauliflower, cored and separated into large pieces

16 ounces elbow, shell, ziti, or other cut pasta, preferably whole wheat

1 cup grated cheese (like sharp cheddar, Gruyère, or Emmental or a combination)

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard, or to taste

1/8 teaspoon nutmeg, or to taste

Black pepper

1 bag/box of baby spinach

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

1/2 cup or more of whole wheat bread crumbs, optional

Heat the oven to 400°F. Grease a 9-inch square baking dish with a little oil. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and salt it. Put the stock with the bay leaves in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. When small bubbles appear along the sides, about 5 minutes later, turn off the heat and let stand.

Cook the cauliflower in the boiling water until very tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Scoop the cauliflower out of the water with a slotted spoon and transfer it to a the pot with the vegetable stock in it. Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook until still somewhat chalky inside and not yet edible, about 5 minutes.

Remove the bay leaves from the stock. Carefully process the cauliflower and the stock, the 2 tablespoons oil, the cheese, mustard, nutmeg, and a sprinkling of salt and pepper, using an immersion blender (or potato masher, or transfer to blender/food processor). If the sauce seems too thick, add more stock. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Combine the sauce, spinach and pasta, toss, and spread the mixture evenly in the dish. (You can make the dish to this point, cover, and refrigerate for up to a day; return to room temperature before proceeding.)

Sprinkle the top with the Parmesan and bread crumbs if you're using them. Bake until the pasta is bubbling and the crumbs turn brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Serve hot.

(Servings: 8, Prep time: 1 hr., Cook time: 20 min., Difficulty: Easy)