

Torchiette w/ Bacon, Beer & Cheese Sauce

Swick

Serves 1 | Active Time: 40 minutes | Total Time: 40 minutes

Chef's Notes

Smoked paprika adds a very unique flavor to this dish. You may want to add a bit at a time, as it can easily dominate the dish. You can always add more, but you can't take it away.

Depending on the type of beer you use, make sure to match an appropriate cheese. If you use a darker or bitter beer use a sharp cheese to stand up to the flavor. If using a lighter beer, use a mild-tasting cheese.

Preparing Your Mise en Place

To start your mise en place, first bring a pot of cold water to a boil to cook the pasta.

Dice the onion and émincé the garlic. Finely dice the red pepper and roughly chop the thyme. Next, dice the bacon or cut it into lardons. Lastly, measure out the butter, flour, milk and beer, and gather the seasonings.

Step 1: Preparing Your Mise en Place

- 2 tbsp white onion
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/4 red pepper
- pinch fresh thyme
- 2 slices bacon
- 1 1/2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 1/4 cup milk
- 1/4 cup beer (can substitute with milk)
- 1/2 tsp smoked paprika
- pinch cayenne pepper (optional)
- kosher salt (to taste)
- white pepper (to taste)

Making the Sauce | Mornay Sauce

Heat a heavy sauce pan over medium heat and add the butter and bacon. Let the bacon cook until the fat renders (melts). The bacon should almost be cooked but not browned. Then add the onion, garlic and red pepper and gently cook, turning the heat down to medium-low to avoid any browning. Cook until the onion and garlic begin to soften and release their flavors. Then season with the paprika and a pinch of cayenne pepper for extra heat, if desired.

Next, sprinkle the mixture with the flour and stir to form a roux. Let this cook gently for about 2 minutes, being careful not to let the bottom scorch or burn. Then add the beer and stir to combine. Add the milk a bit at a time to temper it. This will prevent lumps from forming. Continue until all of the milk has been incorporated. Finally, add the thyme.

Turn the heat up to medium, if needed, to bring the sauce up to a gentle simmer. Once the mixture starts to bubble, reduce the heat to low. Stir occasionally and let cook for about 10 minutes or so. While the sauce cooks, go ahead and cook the pasta.

You now have a flavored variation of a classic béchamel sauce.

Step 2: Making the Sauce | Mornay Sauce

Cooking the Pasta

To cook the pasta, add the salt to the boiling water and stir. Then add the pasta and stir to prevent it from sticking together. Cook for about 10-12 minutes, or according to the instructions on the package. For this dish, the pasta should not be al dente, as you want a soft texture.

While the pasta cooks, grate the cheese and stir the sauce occasionally. Test the pasta and once it is just cooked through, reserve a bit of the cooking water (in case you need to thin the sauce out later).

Next, turn off the heat and add some cold water to the pot of pasta. This will slow the cooking process so you can finish the sauce.

Step 3: Cooking the Pasta

- salt (1 tsp per L/qt of water)
- 400 g torchietti pasta (about 13 oz)
- 4 oz aged cheddar (2 cups)

Finishing the Cheese Sauce

To finish the sauce, turn off the heat and temper in the grated cheddar by adding it a little bit at a time. Stir each time until the cheese melts. By adding a bit of cheese at a time, you prevent the sauce from splitting. Season the sauce with salt and pepper to taste.

Step 4: Finishing the Cheese Sauce

- kosher salt (to taste)
- white pepper (to taste)

Finishing the Dish

To finish the dish, drain the pasta and return it to the pot. Then pour the sauce over top and gently fold everything together. If the sauce seems a bit too thick, you can thin it out with a bit of the reserved pasta water. Taste for seasoning, serve immediately and enjoy.

Step 5: Finishing the Dish