

CAULIFLOWER CHEDDAR GRATIN WITH HORSERADISH CRUMBS

We think of this gratin as a vegetable-driven version of everyone's favorite, mac and cheese. The nutty, sweet undertones of cauliflower are particularly suited to meld with the tangy, salty Cheddar and the spicy horseradish.

— ingredients —

1 large head Cauliflower, washed, trim greens and stem but leave head intact
1/2 stick (1/4 cup) unsalted butter
2 tablespoons pastry flour
1 1/2 cups milk
6 oz sharp Cheddar, coarsely grated (2 cups)
1/2 red onion, chopped fine
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1 cup dry bread crumbs or cracker crumbs
2 tablespoons drained bottled horseradish

— preparation —

Preheat oven to 450°F. Butter a 2-quart shallow baking dish.

Steam cauliflower for 6 to 8 minutes or until just soft when pierced. Drain cauliflower well and transfer to colorful baking dish.

While cauliflower cooks, melt 2 tablespoons butter in a 3- to 4-quart heavy saucepan over moderately low heat and whisk in flour. Cook roux, whisking, 3 minutes. Add milk in a slow stream, whisking, and bring to a boil, whisking frequently. Reduce heat and simmer sauce, whisking occasionally, for about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and add cheese, onions, salt, and pepper, whisking until cheese is melted. Pour cheese sauce over cauliflower covering completely.

Add dried crumbs (or coarsely crumbled crackers) into a bowl. Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in a small saucepan, then remove from heat and stir in horseradish. Pour over crumbs and toss to coat.

Sprinkle crumb topping evenly over cauliflower.

Bake gratin until topping is golden brown, about 10 minutes.

Makes 8 servings