



# MacFongo Balls

SMOKY 🔥 | UMAMI ○ | GARLIC 🧄 | CHEESY 🧀

Like Mac & Cheese and Mofongo had a  
creamy garlic baby

# *Vibes - Mofongo Part 1*

## *Where It Comes From*

Mofongo was born in Puerto Rico from the meeting of African, Taíno, and Spanish food traditions. Enslaved Africans brought the technique of mashing starchy foods like plantains and cassava—when that met local ingredients and Spanish pork and oil, mofongo took shape: fried green plantains mashed with garlic, olive oil, and chicharrón.

## *What the Name Means*

The word mofongo likely comes from Kikongo or Kimbundu roots like mfwenge or mfwongo, meaning “to mash” or “a mix.” Its very name carries the memory of African cooking traditions that survived across the Atlantic.

# *Mofongo Part 2*

## *Why It Matters*

Mofongo represents resilience and adaptation—turning simple ingredients into comfort, flavor, and community. It's proudly Afro-Boricua: a living symbol of how cultures blend and reinvent themselves.

## *Modern Takes*

Across the Caribbean you'll find cousins like Dominican mangú or Cuban fufu de plátano, each riffing on the same idea of pounded plantains (plátanos) and garlic. In Puerto Rico, mofongo stands tall as a national dish—and an act of cultural memory served with flavor.

# *Vibes - Mac & Cheese*

## *Where It Comes From*

*Mac & Cheese* began as a European comfort dish — a mix of pasta, butter, and cheese first appearing in Italy and England as early as the 14th century. It crossed the Atlantic through the American elite, with Thomas Jefferson serving it after experiencing similar dishes in France.

## *Who Really Perfected It*

Though Jefferson popularized it, his enslaved chef, James Hemings, helped bring macaroni-and-cheese to American tables. Hemings adapted European recipes using local ingredients and techniques. Over time, other Black cooks across the South refined it even further — swapping cheddar for imported cheeses, elbow macaroni for layered pasta, and accessible pantry staples for expensive imports.

# *Mac & Cheese Part 2*

## *Why It Matters*

What started as a dish of the wealthy transformed, through Black creativity, into a cornerstone of soul food. It became a dish of celebration and pride — appearing at Sunday dinners, family reunions, and church gatherings. Mac and cheese carries that lineage of ingenuity: taking what's available and turning it into joy, comfort, and flavor.

## *Modern Takes*

Today, mac and cheese moves effortlessly between comfort and luxury — from boxed nostalgia to baked family heirlooms to chef-driven creations. It remains a dish defined by love, resourcefulness, and memory<sup>10</sup>.

# *Ingredients*

## For the Mofongo base

- 3-4 green plantains, peeled and sliced into  $\frac{3}{4}$ " rounds
- 4-5 garlic cloves, roasted
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cooked bacon, crumbled
- 1-2 cups chicken or veggie stock
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Drizzle of olive oil or butter for mashing

## To combine

- Optional 1 beaten egg (for extra binding if mix is too soft)
- Breadcrumbs or crushed dried plantains (for texture and moisture control)

# *Ingredients*

## For the Mac & Cheese mix

- 2 cups cooked elbow macaroni (al dente)
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp flour
- 1½ cups milk or milk + crema mix
- 1 cup smoked gouda, shredded
- 1 cup Oaxaca cheese, shredded
- ½ cup cotija, crumbled
- Pinch of paprika, cayenne, or ancho/chipotle
- Salt to taste

## For coating

- Flour for dredging
- 2 eggs, beaten with a splash of water or milk
- Crushed dried plantains, panko, or breadcrumbs for crust
- Neutral oil for frying (or spray for air-frying)

# Cooking Instructions - Part 1

## Prep Mix Ins

- Roast the garlic – cut off the top of the bulb, wrap in foil with oil + salt, 400 °F, ~35 min - You can start everything else while it roasts.
- Render bacon until crisp, drain, crumble.
- Boil macaroni al dente, drain, toss with a dab of butter so it doesn't stick.

## Make the Cheese Sauce

- Butter » flour » milk/crema » cheeses » season. Keep warm on low; this will fold in later.

## Prep the Plátanos

- Mash hot with roasted garlic, bacon, salt, and a drizzle of fat. You want a smooth, cohesive mash.

# Cooking Instructions - Part 2

## Mix it Up

- Mix mashed plátano + macaroni + cheese sauce.
- Adjust texture (breadcrumbs if wet, crema if dry).
- Chill 15–20 min to firm.

## Form Balls

- Melon-ball size, packed tight.

## Dredge

- Flour ➔ Egg ➔ Crushed plantains/panko.
- Chill 30–45 min (or quick freeze 10–15 min).

## Cook

- Pan-fry: medium-high 2–3 min per side.
- Air-fry: 375 °F, 10–14 min.
- Bake: 400 °F, 15–20 min.

# *Grandpa Bill's Lab Notes*

Grandpa Bill didn't believe in recipes — he believed in ratios, rhythm, and sharing what works. These MacFongo balls follow that same spirit. You're not chasing exactness; you're chasing balance: smoky, creamy, garlicky, crisp. The lab notes are here so you can riff, adjust, and pass it on your own way.

## *On cheese*

Smoked gouda brings depth, Oaxaca gives stretch, cotija adds a salty hit. Mix and match what you've got — queso quesadilla, cheddar, and jack all work. Balance meltability with bite.

## *On plátanos*

Boiling gives you tenderness and a clean, mashed texture; frying first before mashing adds sweetness and caramel notes. If you're feeling bold, do both — fry, then boil.

## *On texture control*

If the mix feels too soft, breadcrumbs are your friend. If it's dry, add a spoon of crema or a splash of milk. It should roll into a ball without sticking to your hands.

# *Lab Notes - Part 2*

## *On breading*

Bread everything. Every single ball. Otherwise they'll sploot like cheesy pancakes in the pan. The flour–egg–crumb trinity isn't optional — that's your structure!

## *On frying*

Pan-fry for crunch, air-fry for ease, bake for batch cooking. They'll all work if your coating is dry and your mix is chilled.

## *On variations*

- Vegetarian: Skip bacon, use smoked paprika or chipotle for depth.
- Vegan: Sub vegan cheeses, plant butter, and oat or coconut milk.
- Gluten-free: Use cornstarch instead of flour and crushed plantains or GF panko for coating.

Grandpa Bill would tell you to trust your senses more than your timer — when the kitchen smells right and the sound of the sizzle changes, you're close.

# Shopping List

## Produce

- 3–4 green plantains
- 1 garlic bulb (you'll roast 4–5 cloves)
- 1 small bunch cilantro (optional garnish)

## Dairy

- 1 stick unsalted butter (you'll use some for the cheese sauce)
- 1 pint whole milk (or substitute part with Mexican crema)
- 1 cup smoked gouda, shredded
- 1 cup Oaxaca cheese, shredded
- ½ cup cotija cheese, crumbled
- Optional: small container crema (for texture adjustment or dipping sauce)

# Shopping List - Part 2

## Meat

- $\frac{1}{2}$  pound bacon (you'll cook and crumble)

## Dry & Pantry Goods

- 2 cups elbow macaroni
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour (for the roux + dredging)
- 2–3 eggs (for binding and dredging)
- 1–2 cups chicken or vegetable stock (for boiling plantains)
- 1 cup breadcrumbs, panko, or crushed dried plantain chips (for coating)
- Olive oil or neutral oil (avocado, canola) for cooking and frying
- Salt and black pepper
- Paprika, cayenne, or ancho/chipotle powder for smoky heat

# *Sources*

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