

Cauliflower and Pancetta Gratin

1 1/2 lbs / 700 g cauliflower (weighed after trimming), divided into florets (approx. two heads)
2 tbsp olive oil
4 ounces / 100 g pancetta, cut into lardons
4 ounces / 100 g breadcrumbs
1 lemon, zest only
2 tablespoons roasted, salted pumpkin seeds (pepitas)
1 1/2 ounces / 45 g cheddar cheese, grated
1 1/2 ounces / 3 tablespoons / 35 g butter
2 tbsp all-purpose flour
2 cups / 450 ml milk
1 tbsp wholegrain Dijon mustard
5 1/4 oz (150 g) soft, herbed cheese (a good grocery store option is shallot-and-chive Boursin)

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the cauliflower florets, bring water back to boiling, then back off heat, cover and simmer 5 minutes. Alternatively, steam the florets in the microwave until easily pierced with a knife. Drain well and lay florets out on kitchen towels to dry completely. This is very important! No one wants a soggy gratin!

To make the crunchy topping, heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and cook pancetta 5 minutes then add breadcrumbs and cook another 5 minutes, stirring. Breadcrumbs should get toasted and golden; turn down heat if they start getting too brown. Leave breadcrumb mixture to cool completely then stir in zest, seeds, and cheddar cheese.

Preheat the oven to 400F/200C/gas mark 6. Grease a large shallow gratin dish or casserole (mine has a 6 cup/1.5 L capacity) and set aside.

Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat. When it bubbles, whisk in the flour and cook for 2 minutes, continuing to stir. Remove pan from heat and whisk in the milk, a bit at a time. Return to heat and bring to a boil, whisking. Continue to cook and whisk until mixture reduces by about a third. Remove from heat and stir in mustard and soft cheese.

Place cauliflower in the bottom of the gratin dish and top with the sauce. Sprinkle the topping over and bake 25 - 30 minutes, or until nicely golden.

Serves 4

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