

ON THE SIDE Hawaiian-Style Macaroni Salad

Hawaiians cook their macaroni until it's "fat." Turns out they know what they're doing. BY DIANE UNGER



We dress this macaroni salad twice: first with vinegar and then with creamy mayonnaise.

MACARONI SALAD IS an integral part of what's known as a "plate lunch," Hawaii's version of diner food: one big scoop macaroni, two big scoops sticky white rice, plus a big portion of a satisfying protein like huli huli chicken. Plate lunches can be found at fund-raisers, church picnics, and beach parking lot trucks throughout the Islands.

My research turned up quite a few variations on Hawaiian macaroni salad. But the key ingredients were consistent: elbow macaroni cooked until very soft, a creamy dressing of mayonnaise thinned with milk, grated carrot, and plenty of salt and pepper. With a few tweaks, I hoped to make this dish ready for the mainland.

Overcooking the pasta, while it seems a bad idea, actually enables it to absorb more dressing (and flavor), so the dressing has to be thin enough to soak in. It took 2 cups each of mayonnaise and milk to get the right texture. I added cider vinegar to boost flavor, but it curdled the milk—not pretty. Instead I poured the vinegar directly over the hot macaroni. After the vinegar soaked in, I poured on about half the dressing, gave the mixture a stir, and let it cool. Then I stirred in the remaining dressing and added grated carrot, chopped celery (for crunch), scallion, a tablespoon of brown sugar, and some vigorous shakes of salt and black pepper.

HAWAIIAN MACARONI SALAD Serves 8 to 10

Low-fat milk or mayonnaise will make the dressing too thin.

- 2 cups whole milk (see note)
- 2 cups mayonnaise (see note)
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- Salt and pepper
- 1 pound elbow macaroni
- ½ cup cider vinegar
- 4 scallions, sliced thin
- 1 large carrot, peeled and grated
- 1 celery rib, chopped fine

1. MAKE DRESSING Whisk 1½ cups milk, 1 cup mayonnaise, sugar, ½ teaspoon salt, and 2 teaspoons pepper in bowl.

2. COOK PASTA Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add 1 tablespoon salt and pasta and cook until very soft, about 15 minutes. Drain pasta and return to pot. Add vinegar and toss until absorbed. Transfer to bowl. Cool pasta 10 minutes, then stir in dressing until pasta is well coated. Cool completely.

3. MAKE SALAD Add scallions, carrot, celery, remaining milk, and remaining mayonnaise to pot with pasta mixture and stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to serving bowl and refrigerate, covered, for at least 1 hour or up to 2 days. Serve.