

Tuscan cooking schools

Coltibuono Lorenza de' Medici, who has published more than 30 cookbooks, started this famous cooking school in the mid-1970s and it is still going strong under the direction of resident chef Francesco Torre. One-day (€155/\$1,500) and five-day (€2,550) classes are held at Badia a Coltibuono, an 11th-century estate and winery near the Chianti region of Tuscany. Participants of the multi-day courses stay in the villa's charming bedrooms, which used to be monks' cells. Clients learn not only how to prepare a complete Tuscan menu, but sample Coltibuono wines and olive oils and enjoy daily excursions led by *A Taste of Tuscany* author John Meis. Classes are held from May to October, or by appointment for groups of six or more in March and November. Tel: 39 0577 744 832; www.coltibuono.com.

Divina Cucina (pictured) The first thing any good cook should know is what to buy, and that's how instructor Judy Witts Francini begins her day-long culinary courses. The 20-year resident of Florence, who was raised in California and is married to a native Florentine, takes her clients to Florence's enormous Central Market and together they plan a menu based on the best buys of the day. After a stop at her favourite wine shop, where a sommelier pairs the perfect wine with her purchases, they return to her studio, where she teaches clients how to whip up a mouth-watering meal. Classes are held year-round and the cost is €230, which includes a copy of her cookbook. Tel: 39 055 292 578; www.divinacucina.com.

Francesco Berardinelli Considered one of the best chefs in Italy, Berardinelli offers daytime courses, for groups of five to 10 people, lasting one to five days at his highly praised Beccofino restaurant and wine bar in Florence. He teaches how to prepare a typical four-course Tuscan menu, such as carpaccio with oranges, black olives and fennel, tortelli with potatoes, leeks and scampi, roasted pigeon with rosemary, sautéed spinach and polenta and a ricotta cheesecake for dessert. Or, participants can make their own dishes, putting together seafood, vegetarian, Christmas or Easter menus. Offered year-round, the daily cost is €100, which includes wine and lunch. Tel: 39 055 290 076; www.francescoberardinelli.com.

Tuscan Women Cook Held at country homes and restaurants in Montefollonico, an enchanting, medieval Tuscan hilltop village an hour south of Florence, Tuscan Women Cook teaches recipes passed down through the generations. During week-long courses, participants make favourites such as gnocchi, tagliatelle and the local picci, learn about wine and visit sites such as a pecorino cheese farm and food market. Classes are taught in Italian, but fully translated into English. American expatriates Bill and Patty Sutherland run this popular programme, which fills up quickly. As well as the cooking, it offers time for



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sightseeing in Florence and shopping at Italian designer outlets. The cost is €2,270 and includes six nights' hotel accommodation and all meals. Tel: 39 0577 669 444; www.tuscanwomenscook.com.

La Cucina del Garga Garga's dishes are so deliciously satisfying, it is impossible for anyone interested in cooking to leave Florence without wanting to know how to make the oh-so-tender veal cutlet with avocado and truffle cream or tagliolini del magnifico (thin fettuccine with citrus zest). Canadian Sharon Oddson, who along with Italian Giuliano Gargani opened the eatery in 1979, offers one-day classes (€155) at her Florence home and conducts four- (€1,800) and eight-day (€3,200) classes at a farmhouse in the southern Tuscan countryside. Lodging is included for multi-day courses. Classes are offered year-round, excluding August and part of December. Tel: 39 055 21 13 96; www.garga.it.

Zibibbo For those who really want to know what it is like to work in an Italian kitchen, chef-owner Benedetta Vitali offers hands-on courses at her Zibibbo restaurant, 10 minutes outside of Florence. Perfect for those interested in cooking at a professional level, course one (€660) is an intensive week-long programme that offers a maximum of two people the chance to work alongside her kitchen staff in the mornings, learning how to prepare and cook pasta, sauces, meat, fish, vegetable stocks and desserts. Participants also have the option of taking part in the restaurant's dinner service. Course two (€385) is held over four consecutive Saturday mornings and focuses on pasta and meat, fish, dessert and wine. There is an eight-person limit for the second course. Classes are held every month, except July, and do not include lodging. Tel: 39 055 433 383; www.zibibbonline.com/firstpgusa/firstpgusa.htm.
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