



*Giulia Scarpaleggia*

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# From the Markets of Tuscany

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*A collection of traditional,  
seasonal recipes*



Guido Tommasi Editore



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# Introduction

Friday is market day in Colle Val d’Elsa, and from the early morning hours, something is different in the air.

Dusty old Jeeps and small runabout commercial vehicles are on the road for the occasion, all making their way towards town from the surrounding countryside and villages.

It’s a day for catching up with friends and neighbors, a day when old people sporting hats in every season gather for a chat near Piazza Arnolfo, and grandmothers take advantage of the chance to do some shopping, to pay their weekly visit to the doctor and to stop in at the general store to catch up on the latest news with friends. When school is out for the summer, clusters of Italian teenagers loiter in the market square, one of their few opportunities to meet outside the classroom.

To every generation, the market is the beating heart of the town, pulsing with chitchat, friendly shouting and bargaining, and the aroma of roast chicken, croquettes and porchetta.

When I was little, my grandfather Biagio worked in an office that faced on to the marketplace, a snug space with just enough room for his desk, a bookshelf, and a small chair for me to sit when I’d visit. In summer, my father would take us to the Colle market on his way to work. We would arrive early, when the stands were still getting set up. I’d bring my summer homework with me and be very, very good. Then at mid-morning my grandfather would close up his office and take me for a short walk, holding my hand in his. Sometimes he would take me to have a second breakfast at the bar, other times to buy roast chicken and croquettes to take home for lunch with my grandmother.

In San Gimignano, on the other hand, where I’d go to spend a few days with my other grandfather, Remigio, aunt Silvana and Margherita, market day was Thursday. We’d walk through the entire town, up and down its streets from Porta San Matteo to Porta San Giovanni to get to the market, while my aunt chattered, stopping to greet friends and acquaintances along the way. Then we’d head back home loaded down with shopping bags, ready to sort out all the produce for the coming days’ menus as soon as we walked in the door.

When I took up teaching Tuscan cooking classes, I began to appreciate anew just how extraordinary markets are. Strong human ties are formed here—while giving tips on how to cook eggplants, discussing which fish is best suited for the mixed seafood dish *trabaccolara* or the differences between Tuscan and Sienese pecorino cheese.

Travelling around Tuscany for over a year to visit its weekly, large indoor and smaller organic markets was a learning experience, one that helped me to better know and love this region I call home—my place in the world. While I was lost in small talk with local producers, buying everything from honey and local cheeses to pork fat sausages and fragrant peaches, my husband Tommaso would follow me with camera in hand, capturing what was unique about every market and how each differed in character and changed with the seasons.

A crisis of sorts struck me while writing this book: I had serious doubts about how to organize Tuscany into more or less uniform geographic areas. Had I allowed the centuries-old parochialism and derisive hostilities of this region to influence me, this book would have contained more chapters than an encyclopedia. Putting Pisa and Livorno together seemed impossible, and uniting Garfagnana and Lunigiana in the same chapter equally unthinkable, because in spite of their proximity, these are areas with distinctive characters, landscapes, traditions and products.

Ultimately, I chose to gather all the recipes together and divide them into courses in order to avoid upsetting people’ sensibility and fueling the geographical “feuds” that characterize this region.

With this book, I would like to take you on a journey through Tuscany at its most genuine, from market to market and recipe to recipe, and finally to the kitchen, where you will be able to recreate the true flavors of this extraordinary region comprised of coasts, mountains, marshy plains, and hills swathed in grapevines and olive trees. You’ll learn about traditional breads, from the essential unsalted Tuscan bread to breads made from chestnut flour or potato. The meat dishes include recipes made from game and offal, while the fish recipes range from coastal specialties like the Livornese fish soup *cacciucco* to the fish and vegetable dish from Orbetello known as *pesce all’isolana*. Each chapter is teeming with vegetables and fruit, which should always be selected in accordance with seasonality and local production guidelines. And lastly, the desserts, recipes encompassing all the traditional flavors, those rustic cookies and cakes of the past, handed down to me by my grandmother.

I hope you will make good use of this book. Smudge its pages with flour and oil. Take it with you as you travel through Tuscany to discover its markets and local products. And bring it to life through your own experiences.



# A GUIDE TO TUSCAN CITIES AND THEIR FOOD MARKETS

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# FLORENCE

## *My Love Affair with Florence*

I came to know Florence around age 25, when I left the security of my family home in Val d'Elsa, and Siena, where I had studied, to venture out into the big city. Perhaps owing to my being a country girl, Florence seemed larger than life to my eyes. I found it enormous, chaotic, and yet I freely admit that I immediately fell for Florence's charms.

More a large town than a true city, Florence is still comprised of individual districts, each with its artisan workshops, local markets, small squares and alleyways, in addition to the areas swarming with tourists. Thanks to friends I met there—and, some years later, to love—I discovered a city that I'd not known prior. And I fell in love with it.

I challenge anyone to resist the allure of Piazzale Michelangelo, or San Miniato al Monte, with all of Florence stretched out before you as the Arno River glistens below, as it does in every season and every moment of the day.

Florence was so many things to me. Wandering its streets with a gelato in hand, or exploring its traditional tripe and lampredotto vendors with all manner of people in line: students, workers and tourists. Florence with its central landmark, the Duomo, its historic cafés and evenings spent along the Arno.

It was Florence's markets, however, that ultimately won me over. Drawn in by the colors and aromas, at first I would follow the trail of scents, of ripe late-spring strawberries or porcini mushrooms from the fall woods. But then I would get to talking with vendors, who were always happy to share their tales and their recipes, their lively eyes behind heaps of fruits and vegetables.

Located just outside the San Lorenzo and Sant'Ambrogio indoor markets—true Florentine institutions—these neighborhood outdoor farmers markets remain the beating heart of this city. Every morning, in every season, they slowly come to life at the break of day, attracting locals to shop for fruit, vegetables, tripe, salted cod, fresh ricotta and more. Then there's the market at Florence's Piazza delle Cure, near the soccer stadium—one of my favorites. At this market I learned how to make minestrone, while listening in as some produce vendors chattered on.

Some of Florence's more noteworthy squares come to life once a month with local organic markets, starting with the Fierucola market in Santissima Annunziata on the first weekend of the month. Each market day highlights a different product: wool, honey, bread, oil. The third Sunday of the month sees the organic market in Piazza Santo Spirito, while come the first Saturday of the month, Piazza della Repubblica plays hosts to its farmers market, with producers coming in from the Florentine countryside to sell vegetables, organic wine, cheese and honey.

# Sant' Ambrogio Market

WHERE: Piazza Ghiberti and Piazza Sant' Ambrogio, Florence.

WHEN: Monday to Saturday, 7am to 2pm.

NOT TO MISS: Maria's organic avocados, seasonal vegetables, roast pork loin with pears, and the chicken galantine from the Valdarno Meat Coop.

WHERE TO EAT: Inside the market at Trattoria Da Rocco for tripe, tongue salad, or the "Albertino", a specialty sandwich made with stewed donkey meat from nearby Semel; or at Chef Fabio Picchi's Cibreo and Teatro del Sale restaurants, at the corner of Piazza Ghiberti.

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Just outside Florence's city center, the Duomo and Palazzo della Signoria, and very near the Synagogue, La Nazione newspaper offices, Piazza d'Azeglio and the large boulevards, Sant' Ambrogio market offers everything an Italian—or rather, Tuscan—market should.

Compared to the recently restructured, more centrally located San Lorenzo market, popular primarily with tourists, Sant' Ambrogio is a lively marketplace frequented by Florentines.

The outdoor area offers the usual neighborhood market chaos, with fruit and vegetable stands on one side, and clothes and shoes, plants, flowers and household items on the other.

This is where I go, around the back of the market facing Via de' Macci, to visit the foods section, in particular to stop by Maria's counter, featuring local products as well as oranges, lemons, mandarins, and avocados, all from Sicily. Here I buy bitter oranges for marmalade in winter, and the best avocados I've ever tasted in Italy: small, dark and ripe. Among all the vendors at Sant' Ambrogio market, there's one who is also a farmer, Paolo from the Falani farm, whose hands tell of long hours of work in the fields. Large and strong, they are always poised to point out the best radishes for you, to hand you your bag of purchased goods, to take yours in his in friendly greeting.

The commercial vendors offer several specialty items, exotic fruits, and Asian products like fresh tofu. Albertino's counter sells sandwiches, cold cuts, soft ripened cheeses and raw milk. Open since August 2014, Albertino's counter at Sant' Ambrogio enjoys a loyal clientele. And no wonder. You can't take your eyes off him as he slices up some prosciutto for sandwiches. Although leaving the outdoor market stands with their head-turning colors and aromas is always a bit difficult, the indoor market also deserves attention.

At the outdoor market, fruit and vegetables reign, but inside it's all about meat and fish. Here, the fish counter takes up a large portion of the indoor space, with both fresh and frozen fish on offer. The length of an entire wall, the large counter is set up freshly every day, with sea and fishing zone maps on the wall behind together with informative signs on various types of fish. You can almost smell the saltiness of the sea in the air.

Yet the real star of Sant' Ambrogio's indoor market is meat. Osvaldo, the Lanini chickenery and the Valdarno Carni are more than mere meat counters; they're like small theaters running daily performances, the butchers like congenial storytellers.









## *Viareggio, the Fish Market on the Pier*

**WHERE:** On the Viareggio pier.

**WHEN:** Every morning.

**NOT TO MISS:** The freshly caught fish, naturally. Get there early to find the best selection..

**WHERE TO EAT:** At Tito del Molo on Viale Regina Margherita, famous for its grilled and fried fish dishes.

**OUTSIDE THE MARKET:** Get out and enjoy the sea while catching super fresh fish with Moreno and Enrico of Mas 500, located along the Darsena Toscana in Piazzale Don Sirio Politi.

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**T**he fishing vessels dock around 10am in Viareggio, delivering the previous night's catch of fresh fish to the stands along the pier.

You can easily recognize which of these colorful, chatty and able merchants are the fishermen as they hang around behind each stand. Dealings with fishermen here are straightforward. While some might offer market prices considerably lower than those of a regular fish shop, the negotiating calls for skill and experience as well as the ability to distinguish the quality of the fish.

The selection is limited compared to what you would find at a fish shop, owing to the fact that everything sold along the pier is fished just hours before. Nothing could be more local, seasonal and sustainable.

Further on are the stalls run by the Mare Nostrum cooperative, another recommended place for buying excellent fresh fish and a good choice for non-experts like myself. This is where I ran into Moreno Pellegrini.

Moreno is not just a fisherman. He also organizes fishing trips for tourists, taking sea- and fish-lovers on a unique experience on his boat. The day's catch becomes the meal, prepared in Moreno's very small yet nicely equipped kitchen (it made me rethink my views on small spaces, actually).

My experience in Viareggio turned out to be one of the most meaningful of my journey through Tuscany's markets. Moreno added some chairs to the table on his boat, then squeezed into this tiny kitchen and invited us to lunch. Between the hypnotic rolling of the sea and aroma of garlic and oil filling the air, I spent a few hours watching the secrets of seafood cooking unveil before my eyes: the highest quality fresh fish, quick cooking times and, per Moreno, a grating of lemon zest to lend that extra special touch to every dish.





## CIPOLLE AL FORNO CON PANE, PECORINO E CAPPERI

### *Baked Onions with Bread, Pecorino and Capers*

*from Certaldo's Market*

Years ago in Certaldo I met Gabriele. He used to sell bread and cheese there. Always smiling, he would call you over to taste a slice of his goat's milk grana cheese or a little piece of bread with oil. Behind his decision to set up a market business with his daughter Carlotta is a story of solidarity, one that will have you stopping to smile with him.

He knows which cheese to recommend for every occasion and for every recipe. When I told him I wanted to make baked onions, he expertly cut me a slice of Sienese pecorino, because, as he explained, it melts without releasing liquid and is thus best suited to baked dishes.

#### INGREDIENTS FOR 4 PEOPLE

3 medium Certaldo onions  
(or other sweet red onion)  
2 slices stale Tuscan bread  
80 g (3 oz) medium-aged Sienese  
pecorino cheese  
1 small bunch fresh parsley  
1 garlic clove  
1 tbsp salt-packed capers  
1 tbsp pitted black olives  
salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
extra virgin olive oil

Peel the onions and remove the outer layer. Slice them length-wise to about 1 cm (1/2 inch) thickness. Cover a baking sheet with baking paper. Grease with olive oil and arrange the onions on top, with the slices side by side.

Make the dressing. Briefly soak the stale bread in cold water. Finely chop the parsley with the garlic, the rinsed capers and the pitted olives. Drain the bread and squeeze the excess liquid from it. Add the mince of capers, parsley, garlic and olives. Add the grated pecorino and adjust for salt and pepper.

Sprinkle the dressing mixture on the onion slices and finish by drizzling with olive oil. Using softened stale bread rather than bread crumbs allows the onions to cook without becoming too dry.

Heat the oven to 200°C/390°F. Bake the onions for about 45 minutes, until they are soft and golden. Serve as an hors d'oeuvres, like canapes.

## PASSATO DI ZUCCA E CECI

# Butternut Squash and Chickpea Purée

*from the Farmers Market in Siena*

The first organic farmers market came to my home town Colle Val d'Elsa about fifteen years ago. Upon reading the news, I could barely contain myself! A local farmers market, the chances it offered—to buy directly from area producers and speak with them, to touch the variety of seasonal products with my own hands—was a dream come true. It was at this very market I started my first cooking classes for children, held inside a large tent in the town square. We would meet one Sunday a month. First we would do the shopping, browsing the stands and filling up wicker baskets at times larger than the children themselves. Then we would cook together, our goal being to introduce children to seasonal fruit and vegetables and demonstrate how something formerly unknown to them could be transformed into something tasty.

### INGREDIENTS FOR 4 PEOPLE

#### FOR THE PURÉE

600 g (1 & 1/3 lb) butternut squash  
1 leek, finely sliced  
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
600 g (1 & 1/3 lb) chickpeas, cooked  
600 ml (2 & 1/2 cups) chickpea cooking liquid  
fine sea salt  
black pepper  
nutmeg

#### TO SERVE

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
4 tbsp mixed seeds  
a handful sage leaves  
4 tbsp full-fat yogurt

Peel the squash, cube the flesh and place in a large casserole pot along with the oil and leek. Cook on medium heat for about 25 minutes, stirring frequently to flavor the squash and prevent the leek from burning (which would result in a bitter flavor).

Next add the chickpeas and their cooking liquids. Cook for another 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Process the entire mixture. Adjust for salt and pepper and add a pinch of grated nutmeg.

In a small pan toast the seeds with oil and sage leaves until shiny.

Serve the soup with a dollop of yogurt, a drizzle of olive oil, and the toasted seeds.



## TRIGLIE ALLA LIVORNESE

### *Livorno Style Mullet*

*from the Central Food Market in Livorno*

This is a traditional Jewish dish. Livorno was once a carriage-free port town which welcomed Jews as it did people of every nationality and background. The freedoms guaranteed by the Livorno Constitution to whomever came to this city extended to the Jews as well. Here they were not confined to ghettos, nor subjected to other limitations or humiliations. Expelled by Christian Spain, they arrived carrying a few tomato plants in Livorno, where they taught the local population—and then the rest of the country—how to cook with tomato. Thus many traditional Livornese dishes are rich with red tomato, dishes ranging from *cacciucco* fish soup to pan-cooked mullet. The mullets used here are red mullets, those with the shimmery, reddish-purple color—a color called *amaranto* in Italian. Interestingly, *Amaranto* is also the name of the Livorno soccer team, as celebrated in the 1930s as the red mullet of Livorno. Smaller mullets, those weighing less than 100 g, are very good for frying. They often end up in the typical mix of fish used in a fish fry. Those weighing 100 g can also be cooked in tomato sauce—the Livornese tomato sauce, to be precise. Those weighing 200 or 300 g are good for cooking *en papillote*, while those even larger can be grilled. Technically speaking, the recipe here for Livornese style red mullet is an economical one, yet its sauce is one of the most flavorful you can imagine. One whiff of its aroma will have your mouth watering. Don't overlook the bread, a fundamental accompaniment to this dish.

#### INGREDIENTS FOR 4 PEOPLE

8 red mullets,  
each weighing about 100 g  
(3 & ½ oz)  
extra virgin olive oil  
1 small bunch fresh parsley  
+ more for garnishing  
2 garlic cloves  
500 g (just over 1 lb) peeled  
tomatoes  
salt  
red chili pepper (to taste)  
fresh bread

Start by rinsing the fish well, then scaling and gutting it. Set the fish aside once it is rinsed and dried.

Finely chop the 2 garlic cloves together with the parsley. Cover the bottom of a large pan with oil and add the mince. Cook until the garlic begins to sizzle.

Purée the peeled tomatoes and add to the pan as soon as the garlic begins to brown. Adjust for salt and chili pepper and cook for about 10 minutes on low heat to create a thick, flavorful sauce (the best part of this dish).

Add the fish to the pan, carefully arranging them side by side.

Cook on low for about 10 minutes, without turning them. Red mullet is a delicate fish that shouldn't be touched while cooking. Simply cover them from time to time with the sauce.

Finish with a dusting of the fresh parsley and serve with plenty of fresh bread, as half the pleasure of this dish is dipping a chunk of bread into the wonderful sauce.





PERE VOLPINE AL VINO ROSSO

## *Volpina Pears in Red Wine*

*from Marradi's Market*

How many types of pears do you know of? How many apple varieties can you recognize in the supermarket produce section? That is, aside from the usual four or five varieties with their respective shapes, colors and flavors. But beyond these widely known types, there's a fascinating world of variety—the so-called forgotten fruits.

Luckily they've not all been forgotten, at least not by farmers and small producers. It's still possible to find fruits with oddly sounding names at places like food festivals and market fairs, mostly pears and apples. Several local producers in Marradi, especially those from the Brisighella area in Romagna, bring crates of interesting apples to market: knobby apples and apples that seem frozen inside or taste of lemon line up alongside sorbs and jujubes. The very small, firm and sour pear variety known as Volpina is generally stored from autumn until Christmas time. They scent the house with their lovely fragrance, and are delicious cooked in red wine. The recipe from Romagna calls for sugar and Sangiovese wine, but I make these with Chianti. While spiced and sweetly intoxicating on their own, they also pair well with vanilla ice cream, rice pudding, panna cotta or chocolate cake.

### INGREDIENTS FOR 4 PEOPLE

2 Volpina pears  
(or other small, sour variety)  
750 ml (3 cups) Chianti wine  
2 tbsp brown sugar  
1 stick cinnamon  
2 star anise seeds

Peel the pears, leaving the stems in place. Line them up in a large saucepan or casserole dish and cover with the wine and brown sugar. Add the cinnamon stick and the star anise seeds. Cook on low heat for about an hour, covered.

Let cool and serve with the sauce formed during the cooking. The pears can be served alone or accompanied by vanilla ice cream.

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Discover the essence of Tuscany through its bustling markets. This book offers a collection of traditional recipes and insightful stories that transport you to the heart of Tuscan food culture. It will inspire you to create and enjoy the true flavors of this region, giving you also an insider's access to its most charming markets.

*For more on the author,  
visit [julsKitchen.com](http://julsKitchen.com)*



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