

Title:

Food in Italy: Italian cooking and dining from your villa or apartment

Word Count:

983

Summary:

If you've rented a villa or apartment in Italy, no doubt you'll be trying to sample all the foods of Italy you can-- dining out and eating in. Here's a quick and easy guide for getting food in Italy, whether you're ordering your first Italian meal at that sumptuous restaurant down the street or buying produce at the local market to create your own authentic Italian food.

Keywords:

food in italy, italian food, italian food recipe, italian cooking, italian dining, italian dining customs, villy in italy, apartment in italy, foods in italy, italian foods, italian cooking recipe

Article Body:

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**Shopping for Italian Food**

One of the great delights of renting an Italian villa or apartment is shopping for produce at an outdoor market. Virtually all towns in Italy have an outdoor market, usually once a week (ask around to find out which day). But regardless of whether you're at a market, a small grocery, or a supermarket, there is just one rule to remember when shopping for food in Italy: DO NOT TOUCH THE PRODUCE. We're quite used to handling our apples and oranges in the US, but in Italy it is considered very rude!

In an outdoor market, you should indicate which fruits or vegetables you need, and the seller will pick out the best specimens for you. Don't try to indicate that you don't, for example, want that slightly green lemon-- picking out produce is a point of honor for sellers, and rejecting his/her choice is an insult! Another thing to note about open markets in Italy is that there is no bargaining. In Italy, a price is a price.

In a small grocery, you still can't touch the produce (no matter how much you

want to)! Instead, wait until an employee comes to help you. Indicate your choices and the employee will pick the produce and put it in a bag.

If you really need control over your produce selection, try a large supermarket: here you will be provided with plastic gloves so that you can pick your own fruits and vegetables! Weigh each bag and punch a button for that particular item, whereupon a machine will dispense a sticker that you should put on the bag before taking it to the checkout line.

Another great place to pick up some traditional Italian food is a deli. There are no special rules here (although you might have to "take a number" or wait in line). Pick up delicious marinated meats, prepared olives, artichoke salads, roasted peppers, fresh mozzarella, and everything else you might find at a full-service American deli-- only better!

Here's a list of some delicious common foods in Italy:

- *Pane* (bread: get it fresh in the morning!)
- *Aceto* (vinegar: balsamic or wine)
- *Aglio* (garlic)
- *Basilico* (basil)
- *Olio di Uliva* (olive oil)
- *Limoni* (lemons)
- *Pomodori* (tomatoes)
- *Capperi* (capers)
- *Porcini* (mushrooms)
- Other vegetables: potatoes, onions, carrots, green beans, peppers, cucumbers, lettuce, and everything else!
- *Tonno* (canned tuna)
- *Uova* (eggs)
- *Frutta* (fruit)
- *Pollo* (chicken)
- *Vino* (wine)

### **Italian Cooking - Recipes**

What could be better than cooking in Italy with all those delicious fresh ingredients? Here are a few simple Italian food recipes you can make at your rental. If these tried-and-true favorites get old, eat out and then experiment to see if you can duplicate the recipe.

1. *Tortellini in Brodo con Petti di Pollo:* Make a broth using bullion and add tortellini, chopped chicken, and veggies. Serve with local *parmigiano* cheese, mixed salad, and local bread.

2.       *Pasta al Pomodor:* Otherwise known as spaghetti, this is delicious with fresh Italian ingredients! Buy fresh pasta at the market, heat sauce (or make your own), mix in garlic and basil, and add: a can of drained tuna, olives, or artichoke hearts. Serve with parmesan, *insalata mista* (mixed salad), and bread.

3.       *Minestrone:* Saute onions and garlic in oil. Add broth, bring to a boil, and add vegetables (carrots, zucchini, peppers, etc.). Just before the vegetables are cooked, add pasta and spinach. Season with your herbs of choice.

### **Italian Dining Customs**

When you go dining in Italy, remember this: Italy is a food culture! If you're looking for fine Italian foods, it's not going to be fast. Meals are a social event to be enjoyed, one delicious course at a time. Let's begin with the courses, in order:

1.       *Primi* - A pasta dish
2.       *Secondo* - The main course: meat or fish. This course may also include the *contorno*, or side dishes, which are usually vegetables.
3.       *Fromaggio* - Cheeses
4.       *Frutta* - Fruit
5.       *Dolce* - A sweet
6.       *Café* - After-dinner drinks, including coffee, wines, liqueurs, and digestives.

Note also that, depending on the restaurant in question, courses 3, 4, and 5 may be condensed or eliminated (for example, only cheese may be offered).

There aren't any hard and fast rules in Italian dining, but there are a couple of things you should keep in mind. Upon receiving a menu with five or six courses, many Americans feel like they are expected to order one item from each course. Not so! It's perfectly acceptable to order a first, third, and fifth course if that's all you want.

When you order, do so all at once, at the beginning. Don't order the first course, eat, and *then* tell them you want the second! The exceptions are desserts and coffee; at the end of the meal, your waiter should offer you the restaurant's choices.

### **Eating in Italy**

Whether you're dining out or cooking your own Italian meals, have fun! If you accidentally touch that piece of forbidden fruit, remember to say *"Mi*

dispiace!" </i> And when the second course seems to be taking hours to arrive, sit back, relax, and have a good chat with your companions. This is <i>la vita bella--</i> enjoy it while it lasts.