**Tuscany Suggested Reading**

There are probably hundreds of books, both fiction and non-fiction, that capture the history, culture and ambiance of this storied Italian region (and many movies have been filmed in the Tuscany region of Italy as well). Recommendations abound; what you might choose to read will likely depend on your specific interests. Here is a long list, gleaned from several sites on the internet (I’ve only read a few of them so far), presented in no specific order (definitely NOT an exhaustive list; there are plenty of others as well), with a separate section at the end focused on Italian gardens.

The starting point for the craze for all things Tuscan has to be Frances Mayes' 1997 bestseller [***Under the Tuscan Sun***](http://www.cortona.com/frances_mayes.htm) in which she describes the beguiling charm of Tuscany andliving *la dolce vita* through her life-changing event of buying, rennovating, and living in an abandoned Tuscan villa. This was followed by ***In Tuscany, Bella Tuscany****, and* ***Bringing Tuscany Home***. Twenty years later Mayes is still besotted by Italy: her house, the tumbling geraniums, the people and the food—all lovingly documented in her latest memoir, ***Every Day In Tuscany, Seasons of an Italian Life***, with interludes in Portofino, Assisi and Rome and a focus on Renaissance master artist Luca Signorelli.

***Tuscany in Mind***is an anthology compiled by Alice Leccese Powers of fictional stories, memoirs, letters, and poems by an incredibly diverse (and famous) list of English-speaking visitors over more than two centuries about the history and seductive beauty of the region.

In ***A Tuscan Childhood*** (1993) Kinta Beevor, the daughter of bohemian British artists, reminisces about spending a large part of her youth living in an Italian castle in the village of Aulla in prewar Tuscany among writers like Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence.

***The Architecture of the Italian Renaissance***(Peter Murray, 1969) is a heavily illustrated classic covering the architectural life of Italy from the 13th through the 16th century.

***Brunelleshci’s Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture*** (Ross King, 2000) describes how a fifteenth-century goldsmith and clockmaker, Filippo Brunelleschi, came up with a unique design for the dome to crown Florence's magnificent new cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore, in a dramatic study set against the turbulent backdrop of Renaissance Italy.

***The House of Medici: It’s Rise and Fall*** (Christopher Hibbert, 1974) follows Florence's first family of the Renaissance – including power-hungry bankers, merchants, popes, art patrons and two queens of France – and their huge influence on the political, economic and cultural history of Florence from the early 1430s with the rise of the dynasty under the near-legendary Cosimo de Medici, to Florence's slide into decay and bankruptcy and the end of the Medici line in 1737.

***Italian Renaissance Art***(Laurie Schneider Adams, 2001) is one of the definitive works on this pivotal period, focusing on the most important and innovative artists and their best works.

***The Lives of the Artists***(1550) by Giorgio Vasari, the man who invented the term "Renaissance", offers anecdote-filled biographies of his era's greatest artists, some of whom he knew personally.

**Looking at Painting in Florence 3th-16th Centuries: *A Learner's Handbook***(Richard Peterson, 2014) is a richly-illustrated interpretive guide to the city's art masterpieces in Santa Croce, the Brancacci Chapel at the Carmine, the Uffizi and Accademia, Santa Maria Novella and San Marco, and other repositories to help the reader understand the significance of these paintings.

***The Agony and the Ecstasy*** (Irving Stone, 1958; also a 1965 movie starring Charlton Heston) is a fictional biography of Michelangelo – who sculpted the David, painted the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, and was the architect of the dome of St. Peter’s. The great artist's dramatic passions and furies are brought to vivid, captivating life in this classic, #1 New York Times bestselling novel.

***The Light in the Piazza*** (Elizabeth Spencer, 1960; also a 1962 movie and an award-winning Broadway musical) takes place in Italy in the summer of 1953 as a mother and her twenty-six-year-old daughter are touring Florence and the Tuscan countryside and the daughter embarks on a whirlwind romance with young Italian man, despite her mother’s stern disapproval. The novella also examines the national differences between Americans and Italians, both represented in a somewhat [stereotypical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypical) fashion.

***Romola***(George Eliot, 1863) is a historical novel set in fifteenth century Renaissance Florence, depicting the awakening of a young woman in the time of the Medicis and Savonarola as well as "a deep study of life in the city of Florence from an intellectual, artistic, religious, and social point of view".

***A Room with a View*** (E. M. Forster, 1908; also a 1985 movie starring Helena Bonham Carter) follows a young Englishwoman visiting Florence in the restrained culture of Edwardian era England circa 1900. Villa di Maiano was used as a set for this film.

***War in Val D'Orcia: An Italian War Diary, 1943-1944***by Iris Origo is an illuminating historical glimpse at a devastating time for not only Tuscany, but for Europe at large. Origo's diary is an simple chronicle of daily life at La Foce, a manor in a southern Tuscan village in a no-man’s land bracketed by foreign invasion and civil war during World War II.

[***Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance***](http://www.pbs.org/empires/medici)(2004) is a PBS miniseries that reveals the good, the bad, and the ugly about Florence's first family.

The movie ***Tea with Mussolini*** (1999) is Franco Zeffirelli's semi-autobiographical look at pre-war Florence with a group of eccentric English women living in Florence on the eve of World War II (based on real women living in Florence in the 30s), a rich American Jew, and the son of a local businessman — all caught in the rise of fascism. Villa di Maiano was used as a set for this film.

***A Vineyard in Tuscany: A Wine Lover’s Dream* by Ferenc Máté (2008) is a memoir of he and his wife’s adventures restoring a thirteenth century friary i**n the hill town of Montalcino, planting fifteen acres of vines, building a winery, and excavating an Etruscan village, while learning from famous vintner neighbor Angelo Gaja the secrets of growing the best grapes and making superb, award-winning wine.

**Death in Florence: The Medici, Savonarola and the Battle for the Soul of the Renaissance City** by Paul Strathern (2015) is an engrossing narrative of power, corruption and civic life in Renaissance Florence. By the end of the fifteenth century, the ruling Medici embodied the progressive humanist spirit of the age, with Lorenzo de' Medici diplomatically guarding the militarily weak city in a climate of constantly shifting allegiances between the major Italian powers. His nemesis is Savonarola, an unprepossessing provincial monk, whose sermons filled with Old Testament fury and prophecies of doom reverberated among a disenfranchised population, and whose aim was to establish a 'City of God' for his followers. The battle between these two men for the soul of the Renaissance city would be a fight to the death, a series of sensational events―invasions, trials by fire, the 'Bonfire of the Vanities', terrible executions and mysterious deaths―featuring a cast of the most important and charismatic Renaissance figures and one of the most complex and important moments in Western history.

**Suggested reading on Italian Gardens** (not guidebooks)

***The Italian Garden*** is an internet article written by Susan Mahr (<https://wimastergardener.org/article/the-italian-garden/>, 2016) that provides a brief introduction to this formal garden style with photos from many of the gardens that will be visited on the tour illustrating the general concepts and characteristic features of the Italian garden. A condensed version of this will be included in the educational handouts provided in advance of the tour.

Wikipedia has an extensive article on the ***Italian Renaissance Garden*** at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Renaissance_garden>.

***Italian Gardens*** by amateur garden art-historian Georgina Masson was originally published in 1961 as a complementary study to Geoffrey Jellicoe's architectural work *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance*. The revised new edition (2009) includes the original photographs as well as new images from the archives of the American Academy in Rome (additional photos can be seen in the online photo archive). This classic text is a study of the history of Italian gardens from their inception in ancient Rome to the Baroque. Selecting the finest examples of gardens dating from the Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque periods, it follows the design evolution chronologically and at the same geographically starting with the early Roman gardens around Rome and towards Pompeii, continuing with medieval gardens from Milan to Ravello. The early Renaissance is next, spreading from Florence over Tuscany and reaching Latium and Rome. Slightly later in time and style are the north area of the lakes, Milan and Genoa where the renaissance blends into baroque in many designs. She is also the author of two books on Italian architecture, both of which have been translated into several languages: *Italian Villas and Palaces* (1959) and *Italian Villas and Gardens* (1961).

In ***Italian Gardens*** (2002), Judith Wade explores the developments over more than five hundred years of the traditional ways Italians have cultivated their lands since the earliest Roman settlements into beautiful and creative displays of nature. Visit thirty-seven of the most captivating gardens of Italy – small and grandiose, historic and contemporary – in eleven regions from Lombardy to Sicily. Each locale is vividly portrayed in words and pictures, bringing the experience of each garden to life.

***Edith Wharton's Italian Gardens*** by Vivian Russell (1998) follows in the footsteps of the famous author’s four-month tour of Italy made in 1903. The series of articles on Italian villas and gardens she wrote for Century Magazine were published in 1904 as *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*. Nearly 100 years later Russell returned to the best surviving gardens from Wharton’s book, recapturing both the essence of the gardens themselves and Wharton’s experience of them in beautiful photographs and historical summaries of the patrons and architects who created the gardens. Much of the charm of this book lies in the historical perspective it provides and is a must-read for all lovers of things Italian.

***Italian Gardens: A Cultural History***by Helena Attlee (2012 paperback; hardback as *Italian Gardens,* 2006)) provides a historical look at the evolution of Italian Gardens, from medieval times to the Renaissance, the great gardens of the Medici, the first botanic gardens, Mannerist gardens and their grottoes, as well as the Baroque and other style of gardens of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through to the 20th century when expatriates with money to lavish on their villas and gardens brought new delights.

***Villas of Tuscany*** by Carlo Cresti (2003) is a compilation of descriptions and brief histories of 38 Tuscan villas, accompanied by color photographs of mainly exteriors and gardens that make this a volume for both armchair travelers and historians.