



Makomako (Wineberry) *Aristotelia serrata* & *A. fruticosa*

Indigenous to Aotearoa, Makomako belongs to the Elaeocarpaceae family. It is also known as mako and the names given to this tree, by the early settlers is wine berry or New Zealand currant.

(Makomako seedlings - Cookson Kauri walk, Kauaeranga Valley: Melissa Hutchison)

Identification & Cultivation:

Makomako (*Aristotelia serrata*) is a small tree, growing up to 9 meters tall, though often is shrub-like; it is commonly found throughout the country, it can be frost tender when young; and in cooler areas, be semi-deciduous in winter. It thrives in the margins of the bush and along streams and rivers and is an early growth plant on land that which has been disturbed and can be planted intentionally to provide beauty, food and medicine.

The foliage is a bright green, ovate-cordate and serrated around the edges, with reddish petioles and some veining. It has a flush of flowers from spring to early summer; opening pale and darkening with age. The trees are dioecious (male and female on different plants). If there's a male in the area, to pollinate, the berries will develop and ripen, varying in colour from red to black, forming in clusters.



Aristotelia fruticosa is known as the 'Mountain wineberry'; described as "A small-leaved shrub



(Makomako flowers - Christchurch: Melissa Hutchison)

with hairy branchlets and veins evident on the underside of leaves. Up to 2 metres, it's found throughout Aotearoa mainly at higher altitudes; in shrubby bush and in sub-alpine forests. It flowers in early summer, around October to December, in similar colours to *A. serrata*, followed by berries which can vary in colour from white to pink to bright pinky-red to black.

The species name *Aristotelia* is named to commemorate the great Greek, Aristotle; serrata = serrated and fruticosa = shrubby.

Parts used: Leaves bark and fruit; from the chapter from 'Treasures From Tane' about this tree is titled 'Makomako for welfare, weapons, wood and wine' comes the following quote: "It is hard to believe that one common native plant could produce such a diverse range of goods: lightweight bird spears, net floats, soothing medications to treat sore eyes, burns or rheumatism; jams, jellies; a first rate wine, and even gunpowder".

Constituents: There has been little assessment of the constituents of makomako, it is known though, that the bark contains β -sitosterol, tannins and ellagic acid; Leaves contain the indole alkaloids, aristoteline, aristotelinone, serratoline, and serratolenone, peduncularine and others unique to the species;

Fruit anthocyanins, phenolic acids, flavonoids, and what is it that makes the seeds bitter??? One day we will know more about this wonderful plant.

Therapeutic Actions: Astringent, antifebrile, antirheumatic, anti-inflammatory and antiseptic.

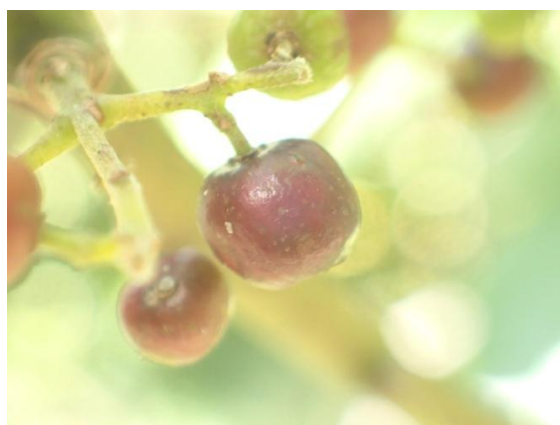
Medicinal uses: This is an important Rongoa herb; traditionally, it was used for treating burns;

For boils and ulcers (poultice).As both an internal and topical treatment for painful rheumatism; Leaves were steeped in hot baths for arthritis and rheumatism and infusions from the bark and leaves were used to treat a burn, boils, sore eyes and rheumatic pains. Makomako can be used as a general tonic for skin problems.

Dosage: Take infusions of the bark and leaves are required; a recommended daily dose is not known, nor the dose of a tincture of makomako. Eat the flesh of the berries, but discard the seeds. Prepare an infusion or decoction to take internally or as a poultice externally for both osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis, or for an aching body. Traditionally the leaves were steeped in hot baths for these same conditions.



(Makomako berries-Karori, Wellington: Tony Wills)



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Culinary uses: The berries of Makomako are much loved by both tuis and kereru, as well as the leaves, humans like the, too; the flesh and juice are quite palatable, the berries though, are bitter, so discard them. They provided a seasonal feast for the Maori and to the early Pakeha settlers; who quickly learnt how to use them; apart from eating them, making preserves and wine, hence its common name! Possums are partial to the berries and leaves.

Other Uses: From the bark, when removed and ‘bruised’, blue-black dye is obtained; this can be utilised for dyeing flax, mats and fabrics. The timber is light-weight and soft, so was valued for carving out to make bowls and the saplings were used to make stilts. The timber is brittle, so not useful for ‘load bearing’.

History & Mystery: Makomako is a plant which is treasured by the Maori people; as both a food, medicine and a dye source. Traditionally either the leaves or the bark were prepared to be used as a wash, bath or poultice. This was considered to be a very effective treatment for burns.

References: ‘Maori Healing and Herbal’ by Murdoch Riley; ‘Treasures from Tane’ by Rob Tipa; <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/aristotelia-fruticosa/> & Phil Rasmussen, Phytomed.

Prepared for the Herb Federation of New Zealand’s Herb Awareness Month 2021. Enquiries: www.herbs.org.nz

Advisory Note: This text is given as a general guidance. If any adverse reactions occur or symptoms persist, please contact a qualified medical herbalist or medical doctor immediately.