

# Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC)

Aristotle was born around 384 BC in Stagira on the Chalcidice peninsula in northern Greece. His father, Nicomachus, was a court physician to the Macedonian royal family, and traced his lineage and his profession back to Machaon, the son of Asclepius. His mother, Phaestis, was descended from one of the Ionian settlers who founded the colony at Stagira in 655 BC. Aristotle must have had at least one sibling, for he later recommended a nephew, Callisthenes, to Alexander the Great, an act he later regretted. Normally, Aristotle would have followed in his father's footsteps and become a physician, but he was orphaned when quite young and brought up by Proxenus of Atarneus, an uncle or a close family friend, who continued Aristotle's education – not in medicine, but in Greek, rhetoric and poetry.

At about the age of seventeen Aristotle went to Athens and for twenty years he was a student and then a teacher at Plato's Academy. In 347 BC, the year of Plato's death, he travelled to the city of Atarneus in Asia Minor, where Hermias, a friend from his Academy days, was the ruler. Aristotle became the leader of a philosophy group there, and started extensive zoological and botanical fieldwork with them at nearby Assos. When the Persians attacked Assos and killed Hermias, Aristotle and some of his followers escaped to the island of Lesbos, where they continued their research for about a year. He was in his late thirties when he married Pythias, the niece and adopted daughter of Hermias. She died about ten years later, some time after the birth of their only child, a daughter also named Pythias. Aristotle later formed a relationship with Herpyllis, from his hometown Stagira; they had a son, Nicomachus, named after Aristotle's father.

In 342 BC Aristotle was invited to the Macedonian court to tutor King Phillip's young son Alexander, later to be known as Alexander the Great, but it is not known how long the appointment lasted. Alexander became king in 336 BC when his father died, and the following year Aristotle, at the age of fifty, returned to Athens and established his own school of philosophy, the Lyceum, named for its close proximity to the temple of the god Apollo Lyceus. Because much of the discussion took place in the school's covered walkway, the cloister, or *peripatos*, the students were known as Peripatetics. Aristotle's Lyceum won acclaim for its distinguished work in the natural sciences, and his most famous writings, some of which survived in the form of notes taken by his pupils, were produced there.

Aristotle found his support for Macedonian policies increasingly difficult as Alexander became more

arrogant and cruel. The political climate of Athens became dangerous, and after Callisthenes was put to death for failing to revere the ruler as a god, Aristotle went into exile, moving to Chalcis in the area of his childhood, in 323 BC. The following year he died of a stomach disorder, at the age of 62.

His observations were the world's chief source of scientific knowledge for the next thousand years. A plant genus and a genus in the animal kingdom (moths) are both named *Aristotelia* in his honour. The plant name was given by the French botanist L'Héritier in 1784; the insect name dates from 1825.



## ***Aristotelia serrata***

*Aristotelia serrata* (makomako or wineberry) is a slender, spreading tree up to 10 metres tall. Leaves are sharply serrated, light or dark green on the upper surface and often flushed with pink on the underside. Trees usually bear flowers of one sex only, long branched clusters varying from pink to red. The red to black fruit were used by early European settlers to make jelly or wine, hence the common name. Māori obtained a blue-black dye from the bark, and used the leaves for external treatment of burns and sore eyes. Fast growing and tolerant, it is found in lowland to montane forest and forest margins throughout New Zealand.