

Francesco Grisellini (1717 – 1787)

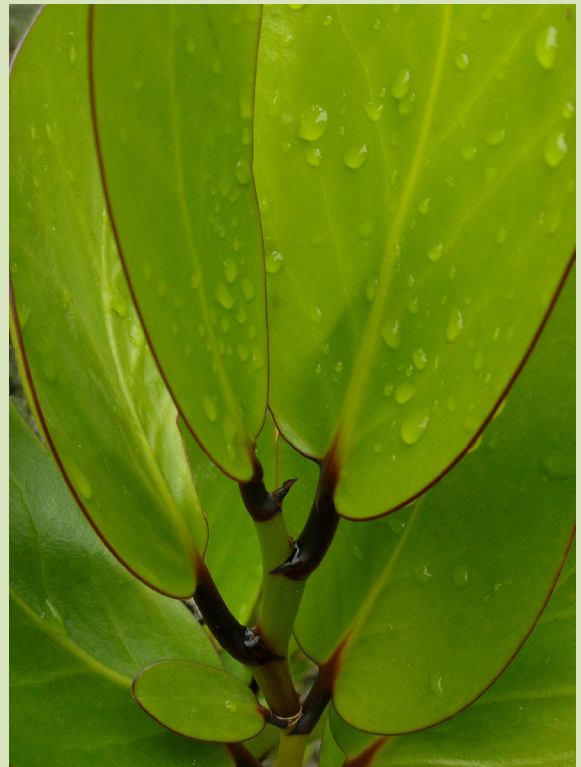
An Italian scholar of the Enlightenment, Francesco Grisellini was born in Venice on 12 August 1717, the son of Marco Grisellini, a dyer and weaver of silk, and his wife Elisabetta Sperafigo, from a Milanese family of silk merchants. As a young man Francesco abandoned an ecclesiastical career, and through self-education became well versed in literature, fine arts and the sciences. The designing of masks, embroideries, book illustrations, murals and maps provided him with a modest income, and in November 1743 he married Lucia Plammuller. In 1760 he was commissioned to restore the paintings on the walls of the ducal palace in Venice, for a fee of 1,800 ducats.

Grisellini read assiduously the scientific and philosophical works of French, British and Italian authors; he wrote plays, essays and papers, and also edited a dictionary. In 1752 he interrupted his studies in natural history to join the rush to write comedies, a genre that had become fashionable, and within a few years had produced several theatrical satires. He became involved in politico-religious debate, inspired by the Venetian patriot, scientific scholar and religious reformer Paulo Sarpi (1552–1623), commonly known as Father Paul, and in 1760 wrote a biography of him, based on careful documentary research.

Turning to agriculture, he produced a brochure on new methods of sowing and cultivating wheat, with information about a seeding machine invented by Englishman Jethro Tull. Public interest in problems of the countryside encouraged him to disseminate knowledge through newspapers and journals, but reform to improve rural economic and social conditions did not eventuate. Disappointed by governmental *laissez-faire*, Grisellini travelled for more than two years (1774–76) in the Banat of Temeswar (now Timisoara, Romania) studying the region's natural history and its people. He became secretary of the Patriotic Society of Milan in 1776, but was overwhelmed by bitter controversy and resigned a few years later. Mental illness afflicted him during his last years of life, and he died in a Milan hospital in 1787.

He was a member of several scientific societies in Italy and abroad, and left a number of works in the fields of geography, history, agriculture and natural science. He is one of twelve renowned citizens represented by wall medallions on the Jacquard Theatre in Schio, the hub of northern Italy's early woollen industry.

The generic name *Griselinia* was proposed in 1775 by Johann Reinhold Forster and his son George Forster in *Characteres Generum Plantarum*, in honour of the Venetian naturalist. It became valid in 1776, replacing *Scopolia*, earlier described by them for a New Zealand species, *Scopolia lucida*. (The name *Scopolia* had already been used for members of other families.) The first specimens of this genus appear to have been collected in 1769 by Banks and Solander at Tolaga Bay during Cook's first voyage. Solander realised it was a new genus and proposed the manuscript name *Lissophyllum lucidum*, but it was never validated. The names of plants described by Francesco Grisellini use the standard abbreviation "Grisel".



Griselinia lucida

Griselinia lucida (Latin *lucida* 'shining'), New Zealand broadleaf, is one of two native members of the genus, which includes five South American species. It is a large shrub hemiepiphyte that usually establishes as a seedling high up in wet lowland forest trees and in open coastal outcrop habitats, eventually sending woody aerial roots, with longitudinal corrugations, down to the ground. The alternate leaves, 7–18 cm long, are thick, leathery and glossy, with unequal-sided blades. Flowers, male and female on separate trees, are very small, and the purple berries on female plants are attractive to birds. *Griselinia lucida* is found throughout the North Island and in a limited area of the South Island. One of its Māori names, puka, is also commonly used for *Meryta sinclairii*.