

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about salads

Putonghua pronunciation: *ye4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yip6*

Meanings: leaf, foliage

葉 has radical 艹 (= 草 *cao3*, grass). Poet praises 紅葉 (*hong2 ye4* = red-leaves/foilage), laments 落葉 (*luo4 ye4* = fallen-leaves). Married son 開枝散葉 (*kai1 zhi1 shan4 ye4* = open-branches~disperse-leaves = bears descendants).

Chinese cuisine uses 綠葉 (*lü4 ye4* = green~leaves) of 青菜 (*qing1 cai4* = green~leafy-vegetables) e.g. 白菜 (*bai2 cai4* = white~leafy-vegetable = cabbage), 菠菜 (*bo1 cai4* = spinach). 荷葉飯 (*he2 ye4 fan4* = lotus-leaf-rice) is fried rice wrapped in lotus leaf and steamed. 生菜包 (*sheng1 cai4 bao1* = lettuce-wrap) is diced meat wrapped in raw lettuce leaf.

粗枝大葉 (*cu1 zhi1 da4 ye4* = wide~branch~big-leaves) describes rough/careless/unrefined person/style. Editor shortens article by deleting 枝葉 (*zhi1 ye4* = branches-leaves = secondary materials).

by Diana Yue