

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.

This week: Words about plant symbolism

梅

Pronunciation: *mei* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *mooi* (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: through, leading to, linking

梅, China's 國花 (*guo hua* = state~flower), is described as 暗香疏影 (*an xiang shu ying* = hidden/secret~fragrance~sparse~shadow/silhouette). 梅林 (*mei lin*) = plum grove. 盆梅 (*pan mei* = pot~plum) = potted miniature plum-tree.

踏雪尋梅 (*ta xue xun mei* = step~snow~search~plum) means snow-hiking to see plum-trees in bloom. 黃梅天氣 (*huang mei tian qi* = yellow~plum~sky~breath) means humid spring-summer weather. 梅雨 (*mei yu* = plum~rain) = spring-summer drizzles.

梅花宴 (*mei hua yan* = plum~blossom~banquet) are frugal official dinners: soup and five dishes arranged like a five-petalled plum-blossom. 梅子鴨 (*mei zi ya* = plum~diminutive~duck) = duck stewed with plums. 酸梅湯 (*suan mei tang* = sour~plum~soup) is sugared plum juice, a cold summer drink.

by Diana Yue