

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 fruit

香

Pronunciation: *xiang* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *heung* (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: fragrance, incense, joss-sticks

Flowers/fruit emit 香氣 (*xiang qi* = fragrant~smell). 香蕉 (*xiang jiao* = bananas) have 香味 (*xiang wei* = nice/delicious~taste). Chefs use 香草 (*xiang cao* = fragrant~grass = herbs), 香料 (*xiang liao* = fragrant~materials = spices). We smoke 香煙 (*xiang yan* = fragrant~smoke = cigarettes), drink 香檳 (*xiang bin* = “champagne”-transliterated).

香水 (*xiang shui* = fragrant~water = perfumes/colognes) fake 體香 (*ti xiang* = body~fragrance), conceal 體臭 (*ti chou* = body~bad-smell = body odor). Euphemistically, 倒夜香 (*dao ye xiang* = pour~night~fragrance) means disposing of night soil in pre-water-closet days.

At shrines pilgrims 上香 (*shang xiang* = up/offer~incense/joss-sticks). Historians say Hong Kong's Chinese name “香港” (*Xiang Gang* = fragrant~harbour or joss-sticks~harbour) reflects Hong Kong once produced/exported joss-sticks.