

Character Builder 您好學嗎？

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 fall colors

葉

Putonghua pronunciation: *ye4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yip6*

Meaning: leaf, foliage

葉 (radical 艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass) = leaf: 草葉 (*cao3 ye4* = grass-leaf = blade of grass), 樹葉 (*shu4 ye4* = tree-leaves), 新葉 (*xin1 ye4* = new/budding-leaf), 葉莖 (*ye4 jing4* = leaf-stem), 葉脈 (*ye4 mai4* = leaf-veins). 綠葉 (*lü4 ye4* = green-leaves) contain 葉綠素 (*ye4 lü4 su4* = green-leaf-essense = chlorophyll).

開枝散葉 (*kai1 zhi1 san4 ye4* = spread-branches-disperse-leaves) means expanding family/business. 粗枝大葉 (*cui1 zhi1 da4 ye4* = broad/rough-branches-big-leaves) describes crude/careless person/style.

Poet praises 紅葉 (*hong2 ye4* = red-leaves/foilage), laments 落葉 (*luo4 ye4* = fallen-leaves). 一葉知秋 (*yi1 ye4 zhi1 qiu1* = one-leaf-know/sense-autumn) means "A fallen leaf shows autumn is here!" or "A small incident/symptom is hint of recession!"

by Diana Yue