

# 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 horticulture



Pronunciation: *cao* (Putonghua, 3<sup>rd</sup> tone), *cho* (Cantonese 2<sup>nd</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: grass, herb

草, with radical 艹 (= 草), means herbaceous plants: 含羞草 (*han xiu cao* = contain~shyness~grass) = mimosa; 煙草 (*yan cao* = smoke~grass) = tobacco; 小麥草 (*xiao mai cao* = little~wheat~grass) = wheatgrass. 草坪 (*cao ping*) = grass patch. 草原 (*cao yuan*) = grassy plains. 糧草 (*liang cao* = grain~grass) means grains for army consumption.

藥草 (*yue cao* = medicine~grass) means medicinal herbs, e.g. 夏枯草 (*xia ku cao* = summer~wilt~grass = *spica prunellae*, good for reducing internal wet-heat). 中草藥 (*zhong cao yue* = China~grass~medicine) means Chinese herbal medicines (alternative to chemical drugs).

草 also means brief/rough. In 草書 (*cao shu* = grass~writing = “grass script” calligraphy), brushstrokes run wild as in abstract paintings.