

# 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

蓮

Pronunciation: *lian* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *lin* (Cantonese 4<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: lotus

蓮 = 荷 (*he*). Summer is the season of white/pink/red 荷花 (*he hua* = lotus~flowers) and 睡蓮 (*shui lian* = sleeping~lotus = Monet's water-lilies). Chinese cuisine uses 蓮藕 (*lian ou* = lotus~roots), 蓮子 (*lian zi* = lotus~seeds). 荷葉飯 (*he ye fan* = lotus~leaf~wrapped~rice) is a delicacy.

蓮 symbolizes spiritual purity and 君子 (*jun zi* = benevolent and righteous man/gentleman). The Buddhist deity 觀音 (*guan yin* = Guanyin /Avalokitesvara) sits/stands on a 蓮座 (*lian zuo* = lotus~seat).

Chinese New Year pictures titled “蓮年有魚” (*lian nian you yu* = lotus~year~has~fish) show lotus-flowers with swimming fish. Pronunciation-wise, 蓮 = 連 (*lian* = continuous), 魚 (*yu* = fish) = 餘 (*yu* = extra/abundant), so the theme is “many years of abundance/prosperity”.

by Diana Yue