

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

松

Pronunciation: *song* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *chung* (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: pine

松 = 松樹 (*song shu* = pine~tree): 松林 (*song lin* = pine~grove/forest), 松針 (*song zhen* = pine~needle), 松木 (*song mu* = pine~wood). 松實 (*song shi* = pine~fruit) = pine cones, 松子 (*song zi* = pine~son) = pine nuts, 松鼠 (*song shu* = pine~mouse) = squirrels.

Eye-catching pine trees in tourist spots are called 迎客松 (*ying ke song* = welcome~guest~pines). 松濤 (*song tao* = pine~wave/surf) is the whirring of wind passing through pine trees. 松脂 (*song zhi* = pine~fat/grease = resin) drips to form honey-coloured 琥珀 (*hu po* = amber).

松 and 柏 (*bo* = cypress) are evergreens, so we wish old people “老如松柏” (*lao ru song bo* = old~as~pine~cypress), i.e. longevity.

by Diana Yue