

# 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 staple foods



Pronunciation: *dou* (Putonghua, 4<sup>th</sup> tone), *dau* (Cantonese 6<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: bean

豆 means peas/beans, e.g. 紅豆 (*hong dou* = red-beans), 黃豆 (*huang dou* = yellow-beans = soy beans), 蠶豆 (*can dou* = silkworm-beans = broad beans). 豆莢 (*dou jia* = pea-pods) contain 豌豆 (*wan dou* = peas). 豆青 (*dou qing*) is the colour pea green.

芽菜 (*ya cai* = sprout-vegetable = bean sprouts), 豆腐 (*dou fu* = beancurd = tofu) are indispensables in Chinese cooking. 豆漿油條 (*dou jiang you tiao* = bean-soup-oil-long-piece = deep-fried dough) is the commoner's breakfast.

目光如豆 (*mu guang ru dou* = eye-light-resemble-beans) describes someone with no vision for the future. 豆腐渣工程 (*dou fu zha gong cheng* = beancurd-dregs-engineering) describes sub-standard and easy-to-collapse building structures.

by Diana Yue