

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.

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 Chinese recipes

菜

Putonghua pronunciation: *cai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *choi3*

Meanings: vegetable, dish, cuisine

炒芽菜 (*chao3 ya2 cai4* = stir-fry~young-shoots~vegetable = stir-fry bean-sprouts): Wash half kilo bean-sprouts. Wash bunch of 蔥 (*cong1*, spring-onions), 芫荽 (*yuan2 sui1* = Chinese coriander), cut into 10-cm lengths.

Rinse handful of 蝦米 (*xia1 mi3* = shrimp~rice = small sun-dried shrimps), fry in oiled wok until 金黃 (*jin1 huang2* = golden~yellow). Add bean-sprouts, 炒 (*chao3* = stir-fry) 2 minutes, 荐酒 (*jian4 jiu3* = offer~wine = sprinkle with wine). Add spring-onions, Chinese coriander, 鹽 (*yan*, salt), 糖 (*tang2*, sugar), 麻油 (*ma2 you2* = sesame~oil), stir-fry 1 minute. Serve immediately
菜 means 青菜 (*qing1 cai4* = green/leafy~vegetables), 餸菜 (*song4 cai4* = accompany~vegi = dishes accompanying rice), national/regional cooking e.g. 意大利菜 (*yi4 da4 li4 cai4* = “Italy”-transliterated cuisine).

by Diana Yue