

Character Builder 您好嗎？瓜

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 fruit

Pronunciation: *gua* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *gwa* (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: melon, gourd, squash

西瓜 (*xi gua* = west~melon = water-melon), 哈密瓜 (*Ha Mi gua* = Hami~melon from Xinjiang, China) are juicy fruit.

Chefs use 冬瓜 (*dong gua* = winter~melon), 南瓜 (*nan gua* = south~melon = pumpkins), 黃瓜 (*huang gua* = yellow~gourd = 青瓜 *qing gua* = green~gourd = cucumbers). Summer soup 冬瓜盅 (*dong gua zhong* = winter~melon~bain-marie) contains diced winter-melon, meat, shrimps. Dried 瓜子 (*gua zi* = melon~sons) are snacks.

Robbers/conquerors 瓜分 (*gua fen* = melon~break/split = divide) spoils. 瓜熟蒂落 (*gua shou di luo* = melon~ripens~tip-of-stalk~drops) describes mature pregnancy and smooth childbirth. “You reap what you sow” is 種瓜得瓜, 種豆得豆 (*zhong gua de gua, zhong dou de dou* = plant~melon~obtain~melon, plant~beans~obtain~beans).

by Diana Yue