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 horticulture

花 = flowers/blooms: 梅 (mei) = plum blossoms, 蘭 (lan) = orchid, 荷 (he) = 蓮 (lian) = lotus, 菊 (ju) = chrysanthemum, 牡丹 (mu dan) = peony. 花 can mean pretty women: 校花 (xiao hua = college-flower) = prettiest girl in college.

Lovers’ rendezvous is 花前月下 (hua qian yue xia = flowers-front-moon-above). 花花世界 (hua hua shi jie = flower-flower-world-border) = city full of worldly attractions. 鏡花水月 (jing hua shui yue = mirror-flowers-water-moon) warns philosophically: existence is transient, unreal like flowers in mirror or moon in water.

花裙 (hua qun) = motley skirt. 花豹 (hua bao) = spotted leopard. 花面貓 (hua mian mao = spotted-face-cat) is saying facetiously someone’s face is dirty/smudged.

Pronunciation: hua (Putonghua, 1st tone), fa (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: flower, pattern, spotted, motley

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