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 barbecues

野
Putonghua pronunciation: ye3
Cantonese pronunciation: ye5
Meanings: untamed, uncivilized, wild, wilderness

野 (radical 里 li3, settlement) = wild/rough/unruly; 粗野 (cu3 ye3 = rough-wild), 野蠻 (ye3 man2 = wild-rough/barbaric), 野獸 (ye3 shou4 = wild-animal), 野心 (ye3 xin1 = wild/unruly-heart = ambition).

野火 (ye3 huo3 = wild-fires) consume 野草 (ye3 cao3 = wild-grass), devastate 原野 (yuan2 ye3 = plain-wild = wild plains). 野孩子 (ye3 hai2 zi0 = wild-child-diminutive = homeless/truant kids) are 野性難馴 (ye3 xing4 nan2 shun2 = wild-nature-difficult-tame = hard to tame/pacify/educate).

郊野公園 (jiao1 ye3 gong4 yuan4 = countryside-wildness-public-park = country parks) have sites for 野火會 (ye3 huo3 hui4 = wild-fire-assembly = barbecue parties). Gourmets love 野味 (ye3 wei4 = wild-taste = game), e.g. 野雞 (ye3 ji1 = wild-hens = pheasants).

by Diana Yue