



Plants in Chinese Culture

“Learning a new language is like growing a plant.”

Introduction: what is a symbol?

A “Big Idea.”

A symbol is an object that represents a feeling or a message.

Example: In Argentina, the Ceibo flower is a symbol of courage and strength.



The symbolism of colors

Red: luck, happiness, and celebration.

Red is the color of fire (warmth, cooking, protection) and blood (life, vitality).

Used for Chinese New Year and weddings.



The symbolism of colors

Yellow: power, success, and wealth.

Yellow is the color of the Chinese dragon or 龙 (lóng).

In the past only the Emperor could wear yellow.

This piece of clothing is called 龙袍 (lóngpáo), meaning “dragon robe.”



The symbolism of colors

White: sadness, absence, and emptiness.

In Chinese funerals, families wear plain white clothes.

No decoration, no bright colors.

Contrast: in the west, white means purity, but in China it is for goodbye.



What do different colors symbolize in Argentina?

What colors can you see around you?

Can you give an example for each color?

What colors are on the Argentina flag?

What do you think these colors represent?

Which colors make you feel calm, happy, or excited? Why?



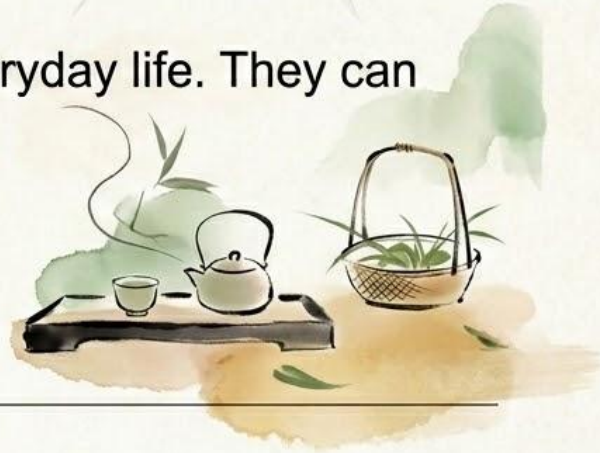
Why plants?



In China, plants are not just nature. They are “teachers” that show us how to be good people. People group plants together to make them easier to remember.

Plants are also important because they help people in everyday life. They can provide food, drinks, clothing, and materials for building.

Let's look at some examples.



Part 1: the Four Gentlemen (花中四君子)

Four plants that represent the four seasons and human virtues.



1. Plum blossom (梅, méi, flor de ciruelo)

Season: winter

This flower blooms when it is freezing and snowing.

Symbol: resilience.

It means being brave and staying strong even when life is very difficult.

Key words: brave, strong, survival.



2. Orchid (兰, lán, orquídea)

Season: spring

Orchids grow quietly in the deep mountains. They have a beautiful smell but are hard to find.

Symbol: humility.

Being excellent without “showing off”.

Key words: elegant, modest, noble.



3. Bamboo (竹, zhú, bambú)

Season: summer

Bamboo is hollow but very tough. It bends in the wind but never breaks.

Symbol: integrity and flexibility.

Being honest and adaptable. Like bamboo, we should change with the wind but keep our heart straight.

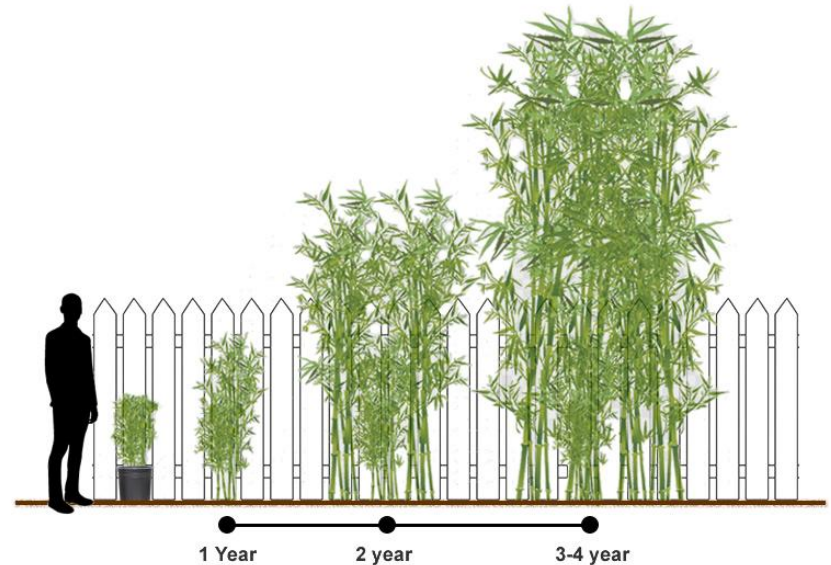
Key words: flexible, honest, upright.



3. Bamboo: a fast-growing plant

Bamboo grows very quickly. Some types can grow almost one meter in one day. This makes bamboo a useful and environmentally friendly plant.

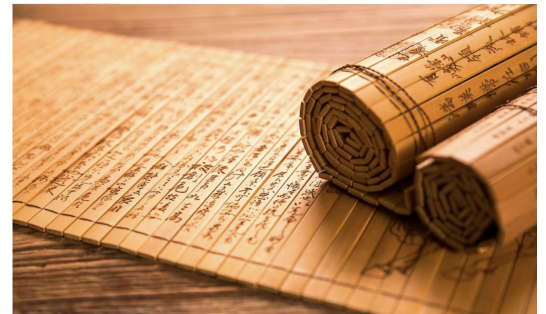
Keywords: fast-growing, renewable.



3. Bamboo: more than a symbol

Bamboo is one of the most useful plants in China. People use it to make houses, furniture, baskets, and paper. Young bamboo shoots are also eaten as food. In ancient China, some books were written on bamboo strips before paper became common.

Key words: useful, versatile, sustainable.



4. Chrysanthemum (菊, jú, crisantemo)

Season: autumn

This flower blooms when other plants die
in the cold autumn air.

Symbol: longevity.

A long, healthy, and peaceful life.

Key words: calm, patient, healthy.



Story time! Peach: the fruit of immortality.

According to Chinese mythology, the Queen Mother of the West grew magical peaches in her heavenly garden. These peaches ripened only once every 3,000 years. Anyone who ate one would gain a very long life or even immortality.

Because of this story, peaches became a symbol of health, longevity, and good fortune in Chinese culture.

Key words: longevity, health, immortality.



Part 2: Three Friends of Winter (岁寒三友)

The Three Friends of Winter are pine, bamboo, and plum blossom. They can survive harsh winters, so they represent people who stay strong during difficult times.

We already talked about bamboo and plum.



Pine (松, sōng, pino)

Pine trees stay green throughout the year, even during cold winters. They can survive harsh weather and continue to grow when many other plants struggle.

Symbol: perseverance and resilience.

Being strong and determined when facing difficulties. Like the pine tree, we should stay firm and keep going through challenges.

Key words: resilient, strong, steadfast.



Part 3: plants in festivals

In China, plants are an important part of many traditional festivals. People use them for decoration, food, and special customs. Different plants are believed to bring health, good luck, and happiness. Let's look at some examples.

1. Dragon Boat Festival

During the Dragon Boat Festival, people hang **mugwort** and **calamus** on their doors. These plants have a strong smell and are believed to keep away insects and bad luck.

Plants: **mugwort** (艾草, artemisa), **calamus** (菖蒲, cáalamo aromático).



2. Double Ninth Festival

The Double Ninth Festival takes place in autumn. People enjoy **chrysanthemums** and wear **dogwood** branches. These plants are associated with health, protection, and long life.

Plant: **dogwood** (山茱萸, cornejo).



3. Tomb-Sweeping Day

On Tomb-Sweeping Day, people remember their ancestors. Some people wear **willow** branches or place them on their doors. The willow tree is a symbol of life and renewal.

Plant: **willow** (柳树, sauce).



4. Spring Festival (Chinese New Year)

During Chinese New Year, many families decorate their homes with **orange trees** and **narcissus** flowers. These plants symbolize good luck, prosperity, and a fresh start for the new year.

Plants: **orange tree** (橘子树, mandarino), **narcissus** (水仙, narciso).



5. Mid-Autumn Festival

Osmanthus flowers bloom around the time of the Mid-Autumn Festival. People enjoy their fragrance and use them in cakes and drinks. Osmanthus is associated with harvest and prosperity.

Plant: **osmanthus** (桂花, osmanto).

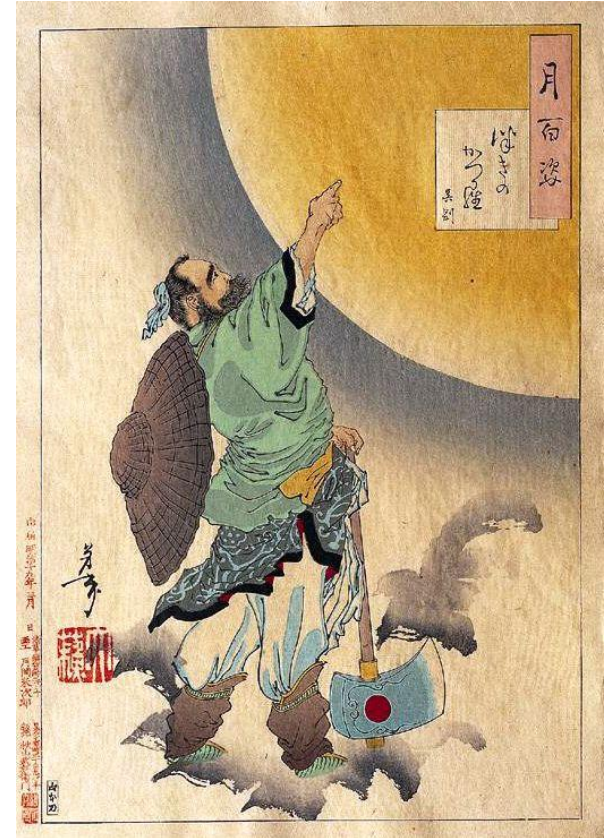


Story time! Osmanthus: the tree on the Moon

A famous Chinese legend tells the story of a man named Wu Gang. As a punishment, he was ordered to cut down a giant osmanthus tree on the Moon. However, every time he struck the tree with his axe, the cut immediately healed. No matter how hard he worked, he could never finish the task.

Today, osmanthus is closely connected with the Moon and the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Key words: Moon, legend, perseverance.



Part 4: more plants for practical uses

So far, we have seen how plants represent virtues and traditions. However, plants are more than symbols. Many plants are valuable because they provide useful products that people use every day. Let's explore some examples.

Tea plant: China's most famous drink

Tea comes from the leaves of the tea plant. People in China have been drinking tea for thousands of years. Tea is an important part of daily life and Chinese culture.

Uses: tea, trade, social gatherings.

Key words: refreshing, traditional, popular.



Mulberry (桑树, morera): the tree behind silk

Mulberry leaves are the main food of silkworms. Silkworms produce silk, an important material in Chinese history. Chinese silk was traded around the world for many centuries.

Uses: feeding silkworms, silk production, trade.

Key words: silk, trade, valuable.



Story time! Mulberry: the discovery of silk

According to legend, an ancient Chinese empress was drinking tea under a mulberry tree when a silkworm cocoon fell into her cup. The hot water loosened the cocoon, and she noticed a long, shiny thread coming from it. She then learned how to make silk from these threads.

Whether the story is true or not, mulberry trees became essential because their leaves are the main food of silkworms.



Part 5: the “King” and the “Pure”

The peony: wealth and honor. Often called the national flower of China. It is big and colorful.

The lotus: purity. It grows in muddy water but the flower is perfectly clean.



What did we talk about today?

Symbol: an object that represents a feeling or a message.

The Four Gentlemen: plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum.

Three Friends of Winter: pine, bamboo, and plum blossom.

Plants in festivals: mugwort, calamus, dogwood, willow, orange tree, narcissus, and osmanthus.

Plants for practical uses: tea plant and mulberry.

The “king” and the “pure”: peony and lotus.

Any Questions?

Feel free to share your thoughts.

