



A vegetable garden and unique signs add color to a rural cafe plaza in Fangxia Village, Qingpu District.

“These local vegetables are fresh and clean. We rarely use chemical fertilizer.

**Man living in Zhuqiao Village in suburban Songjiang District**

# A sustainable future boosted by rural biodiversity in Shanghai villages

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“Hey, shall I pull up these garlic scapes?” a young woman scouting a riverside vegetable field for a possible “harvest” asked a man who had already collected a bunch.

Judging from the way she asked the question, I guessed she was a city woman who had come to the countryside for fun. I thought she was perhaps buying some locally grown vegetables from the man, who might be the owner of the little farm. A little girl, who looked like the woman’s daughter, stood silently in the field, watching the adults “working” alongside each other.

“Yes, just pull them up,” he said.

“But how? Shall I pull them up by the roots?” she asked.

“That’s right,” he replied.

As they talked back and forth, I sized up the environment as I sauntered around. The fenced vegetable field was surrounded by a row of farmers’ houses, an open-air fitness gym and a variety of trees, including a bamboo grove.

I walked close to the young woman, now holding a bunch of garlic scapes in her right hand, and struck a conversation with her: “Lovely garlic scapes! Much better than the ones I grew on my balcony a few months ago.”

I told her I had experimented with growing garlic scapes and bean sprouts for fun. Although I succeeded, my “products”



The author gets a bunch of fresh spinach as a gift from the family of three.

were nothing compared with hers, which had grown in nature.

Then she called the man, who was still bending over and picking vegetables: “Hey, give him some of your collection! He likes our stuff!”

“Our stuff?” I thought to myself. “They must be a couple, and the little girl is their daughter.”

It turned out I guessed right. They said they came to pick some fresh local vegetables to prepare for their New Year’s meals.

It was on Thursday that we met in Zhuqiao Village, two days ahead of the eve of the Chinese Lunar New Year.

Tucked away at the upper reaches of Huangpu River, the

village in suburban Songjiang District was nominated as one of Shanghai’s 46 beautiful villages in 2022.

I went there for a field study just because of the news, which was announced by the municipal agricultural and rural committee on January 11.

“Wow, are you sure you want to give me this big bunch of red spinach? Shall I pay you?” I asked shyly.

“Just take it, it’s fun, and it’s free!” he said, with a smile.

He said he was born and bred in the village, and now works and lives in a downtown area of Songjiang District.

“This vegetable field is my aunt’s, which is bigger and better than mine,” he said. “These local vegetables are fresh and clean. We rarely use chemical fertilizer. My aunt and her neighbors all eat local; they never buy vegetables from a supermarket or whatever market.”

I immediately took a picture of the surprise gift and sent it to my wife. She was overjoyed. My wife and I are both big fans of fresh local food.

Small and neat vegetable fields are everywhere to be seen in Zhuqiao Village, and most are by or among various trees, creating a unique scene of rural biodiversity.

This biodiverse environment once again reminded me of the late American biologist and writer Rachel Carson (1907-1964), who proved a mixed growth of plants would help reduce insect harm and reliance on chemical pesticides.