



Fig. 1. Suburban areas mixed with urban and rural land uses (photo by Google)



Fig. 2. Shimin-nouen in a dense residential area (photo by Shimpo)

Name: Naomi SHIMPO

URBAN GARDENS IN: JAPAN

Urban areas in Japan have historically included agricultural fields because there were almost no threats that other countries attacked Japan. It has been unnecessary to protect a city by a wall and cities sprawled out. Now agricultural fields where professional farmers engage in farming remain still inside urban areas, however, many professional farmers are getting older and cannot continue farming any more. Then, urban residents are now enjoying growing vegetables using abandoned agricultural fields. In addition, brownfields or commercial buildings are used for urban gardening too. The stakeholders have also diversified.

Type 1: *Shimin-nouen* (Allotment Gardens)

This kind of urban garden in residential areas is derived from German allotment gardens, “*Kleingärten*”. When the government was keen to modernize Japan around 1920s, academicians and public officers visited Germany and brought back the concept of allotment gardens. But the size is only 5-30m² per plot. The former land use is agricultural field, where professional farmers had cultivated and stopped cultivating because of their age or low income. The professional farmers, who are also the landowners, lend their lands to users directly or through municipalities. Users are mostly elderly people and they might help in keeping neighborhood safe just because they are in their garden. In terms of creating recreation for elderly people, this type of garden is important in the aging society.



Fig. 3. Taiken-nouen by farmers (photo by Ms Yunoki)



Fig. 4. Taiken-nouen by enterprises (photo by its website:
<http://www.machinaka-saien.jp/farm/sorado-ebisu/>)

Type 2: *Taiken-nouen* by farmers

There are allotment gardens, called *taiken-nouen* (experience, or trial, garden), where mostly a professional farmer not only provides his/her own land to users but offers a course for growing vegetables as a instructor. What should be planted is decided by the instructor and users can harvest high quality vegetables. For example, the size of a plot in one of *taiken-nouen* in Tokyo is 30m² and the fee is from 31,000 JPY/y (227EUR/y) to 43,000 JPY/y (315EUR/y). This type of garden help in keeping agricultural fields in residential areas not abandoned.

Type 3: *Taiken-nouen* by enterprises

Some *taiken-nouen* are operated by an enterprise. In that the planting plan and advice for growing vegetables are given to users, however, this type of garden gives more service to users, or rather customers. The employed instructors regularly take care of vegetables customers are growing. Therefore, urban people who don't have enough time to visit their garden often can use the garden without worries. The size of a plot is tiny and the fee for it is very expensive: For example, regarding a garden, which is located on the top of a shopping building in the center of Tokyo, 100,440JPY/y (736EUR/y) for a 3m² plot, 126,360JPY/y (927EUR/y) for a 5m² plot and 150,120JPY/y (1,101EUR/y) for a 6m² plot. Young people who don't know gardening can easily work on urban gardening and communicate with other gardeners.



Fig. 5. An outstanding community garden in the western Tokyo (photo by shimpo)



Fig. 6. The change of the number of allotment gardens (Type 1) (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2013)

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Type 4: Community garden

Community gardens are getting popular but users mostly grow flowers, not vegetables. They seem to focus more on the communication among users or the promotion of public environment. One of the outstanding community gardens is located in the western part of Tokyo, app. 40km away from the center. They came together voluntarily and enjoy growing vegetables, flowers, traditional Japanese activities and so on without any fee. The organic waste is collected from the surroundings and is put into the soils. The local facilities for children or the disabled work in close cooperation with the garden so that many different people can join the garden activity.

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The number of gardens

The number of urban gardens from Type 2 to 4 are not clarified, however, at least the number of Type 1 is growing according to the statistics by the government. Only from this numbers, it seems urban gardening is getting popular. But not only urban gardening is getting popular, the necessity for using abandoned fields is also a hot issue in Japan because the shrinking and aging society. Urban gardening can be a solution to the social problems.