

《我国医生南极种出蔬菜》



Wang Zheng checks vegetables he cultivated at Zhongshan Station in Antarctica. [provided to China Daily]

For the first time, China's South Pole researchers can eat fresh vegetables grown regularly on-site, according to Wang Zheng, the grower, who came home last month after a 400-day mission in Antarctica.

Growing vegetables in Antarctica reminded him of *The Martian*, a sci-fi movie about an astronaut who survives alone on Mars by eating potatoes he grows there, Wang said on Friday from his home in Shangrao, Jiangxi province.

"I totally understand the main character of the movie. I understand how he feels when he watches a small green plant grow in a fragile man-made environment," said the 40-year-old doctor. But he conceded that the conditions he faced in the Antarctic were "much better than those in the film".

Wang said the growth chamber at the Zhongshan Station, China's second research station in Antarctica, had only a low yield when it was established in 2013. The amount was too small to make it possible for researchers to have

vegetable dishes.

To increase the yield, Wang said, he reduced the number of vegetable varieties and focused on only some fast-growing ones, which makes the output stable.

As a result, during much of his stay there, at least one vegetable dish, such as cucumbers, lettuce or cabbage, was served at every meal for a group of 18 researchers working there.

Wang, an orthopedist, said he knew nothing about botany or farming before he arrived at the station in December 2014.

"I was given this job probably because my office is next to the growth chamber, and as a doctor, I had more spare time than others," Wang said.

He considered many factors, such as light, temperature and humidity. Light music is played in the 16-square-meter greenhouse around the clock.

"Mild music is good for vegetable growth," he said. "We also played Buddhist music, which has soft melody."

"Growers before me did very good work. My job was to maintain the chamber and keep everything working."

Before the harvest, researchers had a very limited vegetable supply for the mission — mostly potatoes and cabbage, which taste awful after months of storage.

"Because of our success in growing vegetables, we can have fresh vegetables every day," he said.

"The Russian station is only one kilometer away from ours. We even had enough vegetables to invite our Russian colleagues for dinner."