

WHEN WE MEET IN THE FOYER of the ITN building it is clear that the Channel 4 News anchorman Jon Snow is emphatically not the proverbial 'grey man in a grey suit': he is fully kitted out in one of his celebrated colourful ties (and possibly socks, though I do not get the chance to lift his trouser leg to look).

Jon has been a member of the RHS for years, and his gardening parents before him. He enjoys gardening both at home in North London and at a weekend house on the Downs in west Berkshire. 'I am a gardener, but I'm more into the jobs than the creation,' he says. What kind of jobs? 'Oh, you know: mowing, digging, mending things, putting things up. The garden in Berkshire was just a mown field with nothing in it, so effectively it has been a process of creating a garden. But I'm no expert.' Perhaps

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this is typical gardeners' modesty, because a little later he confesses to a liking for 'old-fashioned things such as Michaelmas daisies, delphiniums and lupins', although he adds the caveat, 'I can't pretend

to have any great knowledge of plants'.

Jon gardens for all the usual therapeutic reasons – partly as a place to 'zone out', as he puts it – but also because 'with gardening you actually get something done; in journalism you never get anything done.'

Despite the conventions of objectivity among news journalists, Jon has a tendency to speak out on political issues, and he has been actively involved over the years with campaigning organisations such as Prisoners Abroad (he is a patron) and charities such as the New Horizon Youth Centre in London's Kings Cross, a day centre for homeless and disadvantaged youths. Now he is absorbed by the issues around climate change and global warming, describing himself as an 'early believer' who has had all his fears confirmed following a recent visit to the Arctic. 'If

you go up there, you don't need any more persuading,' he says. 'At the research station in Svalbard I met scientists who had lived there for 25 years or so. They showed me how glaciers had retreated a kilometre or more and how the pack ice had not formed now for three winters. They, who live there, are in no doubt about climate change.'

When it comes to dealing with climate change, Jon is of the 'every little helps' school of thinking, and believes that gardeners can make a difference by conserving water, using thermal energy and recycling organic waste – things that he practices himself, by collecting rainwater (with a group of smart-sounding malmsey barrels) and by following a recycling regime in the country (though he confesses that 'it's harder in the town'). As for self-sufficiency, he says: 'We are rather pathetic, as we grow things such as everlasting spinach and carrots and lettuce, but not in a big way. We could do more. It would make a great difference if we were to freeze peas, or store apples. But a crop of spuds takes up a lot of space.'

Jon accepts that many people (including gardeners) still need persuading about the reality of climate change, and he puts this down to the fickleness of the climate and its apparently contradictory messages. 'The public are waiting to be convinced, and then told what to do,' he says. 'Even gardeners are waiting to be told what to do. I suspect climate change will demand pain.' What kind of pain? 'For a start, a preparedness to return to eating fruit and veg that is in season. And a preparedness to increase the density of our cities so that fewer people travel any distance to work.'

He believes that the tipping point is likely to be some disaster – 'such as the Maldives or a corner of East Anglia disappearing under water'. With regard to the politics of the issue, Jon suggests that it cuts across any party political boundaries, and that in the end what will be needed is 'a return to wartime principles, almost like Dig for Victory. That is: growing your own, cutting down on packaging.' It will be gardeners, he suggests, who will be best placed to lead the way on this.

But it is not all doomsday predictions for Jon Snow. He is clearly a passionate believer in the ability of individuals to change the world, and to this end he would like more people to savour the joys of the garden. Jon turned 60 last year, and one suspects that the gardening world may well hear more from a man who is an instinctive activist, yet remains unfailingly friendly and courteous. ■

Tim Richardson is an author and independent writer on gardens and landscapes

Presenting the case

The face of Channel 4 News, RHS member Jon Snow has reported on the changing climate many times, so is in a good position to make his own judgement on the issue, as **Tim Richardson** finds out. Photography by Neil Hepworth

? What do you think? Write to: Viewpoint, *The Garden*, 4th Floor, Churchgate, New Road, Peterborough PE1 1TT. Email: thegarden@rhs.org.uk; please include a postal address.
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