Welcome the rain. It makes our lawns and plants green and healthy. However, it also makes them grow and grow and grow.

Over the past few weeks that it has been raining, you may have noticed that your plants have really shot up quickly. They may have even grown beyond their allotted spaces, in which case it may be time for pruning.

Pruning is a horticulture term for trimming or removing plant parts and is an essential landscaping practice. When there is excessive growth, it is used to control the shape and size of the plants.

When plants grow too large for their space, they need to be controlled. Plants growing out of their boundaries and onto sidewalks, in front of windows or into buildings or into other plants should be pruned. The type of pruning that should be used depends on the type of plant.

Shrubs should only be sheared if they have small leaves, such as boxwoods. Large-leaf shrubs should be hand-pruned with pruners or clippers. Shearing large-leaf shrubs will cause them to look tattered and rough and will decrease their health over time. Perennials should also be hand-pruned.

When pruning plants, always cut to a node, which is the point above another branch on a stem. Be careful not to leave a stub cut. Stubs, (excess branch left above the node,) can leave an entry for disease and insects to enter.

Plants that flower on the current year's growth, like hibiscus or roses, should be pruned before the new spring growth. Plants that flower on last year's growth, like azaleas, should be pruned soon after flowering. For this reason, to have azaleas blooming next year, they need to pruned before the end of June. If pruned later the number of blooms that are produced next year will be decreased.

Pruning plants in the landscape can be time-consuming. However, you can reduce the amount of pruning by following two tips:

1. Select the right plant for the right place. For example, sweet viburnum and ligustrum are two plants that want to grow 10 feet tall or more. When planted in front of a window, they will require continuous pruning. Shorter plants, such as Indian hawthorn or dwarf yaupon holly, would be a better fit for such a location.

2. Cut down on pruning by reducing fertilization. Unless you notice a nutrient deficiency in your plants, fertilization is not necessary in the summer. The summer weather and rains already create an optimum growing environment for plants. Adding fertilizer will make plants grow quickly, requiring additional pruning and causing weak growth.

Fast growth equals weak growth. Weak, succulent growth is susceptible to insect infestations. Hold off fertilizing until the fall unless it is absolutely necessary. This also goes for lawns, which grow quickly in the summer. With fertilizer applications, they will grow even faster, which will increase the need to mow.

Instead of a nitrogen fertilization, which causes the grass to grow, use iron. It can provide the desirable dark green color, but will not stimulate excessive growth.

For more information on pruning, call Osceola County master gardeners from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday at 321-697-3000.
Do you want to ensure that the dollars you spend on landscape services are a worthwhile investment? To find out, attend a seminar, "Landscape Services: Getting the most for your money," at 2 and 6 p.m. July 8 in the Extension Services building at Osceola Heritage Park. The program is free, but registration is required. For more information, call 321-697-3000.

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