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BABCOCK VERGES
The verge is the landscaped area of plants and trees located between the street and sidewalk. The use of native plant material in the verge vs. sod reduces the amount of water needed for irrigation, pesticides, and fertilizer which produce aesthetically pleasing, low-maintenance results that help to protect our natural resources in Babcock Ranch.

All plant material listed in the Babcock Ranch Community Landscape Design Guidelines, “Plant List: Residential Lot Typical” will grow successfully in Babcock Ranch when planted and maintained properly.

Verge Landscape Design Standards
1. Landscape verge may not be planted with sod.
2. 30% total amount of sod allowed in front yard (the total front yard area being calculated includes the verge, even though the verge does not have sod).
3. 75% of all landscape material must be native.
4. A minimum of (1) 4” caliper canopy tree is required to be planted every 60’ in the landscape verge, per lot.
5. Rain garden plantings in the verge is allowed.
6. Cypress mulch is prohibited.
7. Pinestraw mulch and Coco Brown shredded mulch are preferred.
8. Shredded mulch including Florimulch and Eucalyptus are allowed.
9. Rocks, stones, pebbles mulch are not allowed.
10. Rocks and boulders used in rain gardens are allowed.

Several factors must be considered when landscaping the verge (Principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping for a low maintence, friendly yard):
1. Right Plant, Right Place (size, spacing, higher area vs. lower area)
2. Water Efficiently
3. Fertilize Appropriately
4. Mulch
5. Manage Stormwater Run-off
6. Time for Plants to Establish
7. Proper Grading
8. Maintenance
1. RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE

Enjoy healthier plants and reduce work by using plants suited to your landscape conditions.

Achieving a natural, healthy balance in your landscape starts with putting the right plant in the right place. This encompasses far more than simply putting sun-loving plants in your verge’s sunny spots—you also need to consider things like maintenance and water needs. Matching plants to conditions in your landscape can help them thrive, once established, with little or no irrigation and few or no fertilizers and pesticides.

How well your plants perform depends in large part on choosing the right plants for our climate. Florida’s climate varies greatly from north to south. It’s important to plant species and cultivars that are best suited to our region of the state and our soil type.

The secret to successful verge landscape design is thorough planning. The main idea when placing plants in your verge landscape is not to waste time, energy, and money caring for a plant that is not adapted to the spot where it’s planted. Education on recommended plant spacing, watering, and care will increase success. Consulting our UF | IFAS Extension Service for Charlotte County and the Babcock Ranch Residential Association is always a good idea.

**Shrubs**

Shrubs tend to have slower growth rate and may require more mulch maintenance until established. All shrubs should be installed at the recommended spacing.

Some typical residential shrub plantings found in Babcock Ranch that have been very successful (low height, mix of native and non-native) are: Muhly Grass, Flax Lily, Coontie, Firebush, Cocoplum, Walter’s Viburnum, Saw Palmetto.

Plants should not interfere with vehicle or pedestrian sightlines and must be maintained to a height of less than 30".
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**Ground Cover**

Groundcovers and grasses tend to establish faster than shrubs. A fast-growing groundcover will fill in an area quickly or a more moderate or slow grower takes its time and won't get away from you...especially helpful in a smaller spot.

Peanut plant, Horizontal Cocoplum, and Sunshine Mimosa are options for consideration that will hold the ground and reduce the amount of mulch and pine straw.

Planting ground cover or grasses closer to the curb edge is allowed/preferred and can reduce storm water run-off.

*Perennial Peanut Plant ground cover eliminates use of mulch.*

Mimosa groundcover creates a dense green blanket of tiny fern-like leaves that shrink instantly from touch...giving it the common name of "Sensitive Plant." Within seconds of being touched the bright green leaves fold up, to the delight of kids of all ages.

This is one of the fastest low growing groundcovers to fill in a bare spot in a hurry. These plants are also a good choice where soil erosion is an issue,

The little pink flowers pop up above the foliage during warm weather, with the charming look of wildflowers.
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Mimosa takes its job seriously - to cover the ground. It can be harnessed by growing in places that are bordered by sidewalks or drives, or trim back shoots on a regular basis. Groundcover plants, whether they’re flowering or foliage plants - or even ferns - can help choke out weeds as they blanket the earth.

Once you’ve planted the verge foundation shrubs and the stately tree... the addition of one of South Florida's pretty groundcovers can put the finishing touch on even the most minimal landscaping.

2. WATER EFFICIENTLY

Some plants have suffered due to overwatering. As an example, Coontie (an excellent shrub being used throughout the community) has done poorly, or not survived at all, in some locations within Babcock Ranch due to overwatering.

Overwatering does more than deplete the water supply; it also makes plants more prone to disease and pests. Operating a watering system correctly, reduces water bills, decreases plant problems, and lowers maintenance requirements.

Overwatering can also cause water pollution via a process called leaching. Leaching happens when more fertilizer is applied to a landscape than the plants can absorb, or when heavy rains and overwatering cause nutrients to travel quickly through Florida’s sandy soils, past plant roots, and into the aquifer. Eventually these nutrients can reach nearby water bodies, disrupting natural systems.

Even if you do not reside on a waterfront, the land you live on is directly connected to a nearby water body. Surface water that leaves your landscape as run-off (either due to rain or over-watering), together with any fertilizers and pesticides in that run-off, will eventually drain into a water body.

3. FERTILIZE APPROPRIATELY

Low maintenance plants reduce the amount of fertilizer. Too much fertilizer can weaken a plant, promote disease, and invite pests, in addition to wasting money and harming the environment. Before you use fertilizer, you should always determine if it’s really needed.

The following fertilization guidelines must be adhered to:

a. Fertilization will not be permitted during the summer rainy season except in response to special fertilization needs, including but not limited to grow-in or establishment of sod and new plant material establishment, etc.

b. Controlled release fertilizers, or non-chemical water-soluble foliar applied fertilizers, shall be required for all established lawns and landscaped areas.
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c. Quick-release fertilizers shall be permitted during grow-in or establishment of new sod or plant materials, except that no quick-release urea nitrogen products shall be applied at any time.

d. At all times best management practices shall be utilized.

4. MULCH

Mulch protects against soil erosion, maintains soil moisture, inhibits weed growth, improves soil structure and aeration, and reduces pesticide use. Pinestraw and Coco Brown shredded mulch are the preferred types to use in verges. Proper installation and maintenance must be considered. Apply 3 to 4 inches of mulch for a layer that will be 2 to 3 inches when settled. Once plant material is established, less mulch (if any) will be required.

5. MANAGE STORM WATER RUN-OFF

Water quality is a big concern here in Babcock Ranch. We must do everything we can to protect our precious water resources. Storm water run-off is one way the residential landscape can contribute to the pollution of our water. Landscaping plays a major role in the capture and filtration of stormwater runoff – rain or irrigation water that travels off our yards into nearby surface ponds and stormwater drains.

Every time it rains, pollutants such as soil particles, pesticides, fertilizers, oil, grass clippings and other waste travel over yards and driveways in the form of stormwater run-off. Yes, even yard waste is a problem when it ends up in the storm drain. Leaf litter and other yard waste contain nitrogen and other elements that can be detrimental to a body of water. This stormwater runoff contributes to pollution in our surface waterways.

Rain gardens planted in verges are an easy way to return water to our aquifer, reduce erosion, and help prevent storm water run-off.
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Plant a Rain Garden for our Watershed!

A rain garden is a garden planted in a shallow depression within the verge, and planted in a position that will allow it to catch storm water run-off. You can even build a little rock bed stream to gently guide the water thru the garden. You fill your rain garden with beautiful, water-resistant native plants. These plants will never need extra watering. They also don’t require any fertilizer. They’re quite used to making the most out of Florida’s natural habitat, so they don’t need as much help as non-native species do. The establishment and maintenance of a ‘waterwise’ low growing verge garden is encouraged in Babcock Ranch.

How Do I Get Started?

The UF | IFAS Extension Service for Charlotte County can be a great resource. They can give you a lot of great tips on how to make your rain garden a success. Every rain garden is a little different, and it might take some expert help to choose the right diameter, depth, soil composition, and plants.

6. TIME FOR PLANTS TO ESTABLISH

Plants can take up to one year to establish depending on the time of year when planted. Landscaping planted in the Fall (October thru February) will take longer to establish. Landscaping planted in the Spring (March thru July) will establish faster.

7. PROPER GRADING

The finished level and grade of a verge should be no higher than the surrounding top of curb and sidewalk heights. This may require some soil removal in preparation for your verge...
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landscaping. Edging and dividing materials, and service pits should remain level with the ground.

There should be no holes, stakes (other than street tree stakes) or trip hazards, including bollards and physical barriers on your verge.

8. MAINTENANCE

Think of upkeep. Do not overlook maintenance needs when designing your verge landscape. Maintenance includes proper watering, fertilizing, composting, pruning, mowing, mulching, and pest management. The more carefully you plan your verge landscape, the less you will have to worry about maintenance. Newly installed plants need frequent water, but it’s possible to maintain an established landscape verge with minimal amounts of pesticide, fertilizers, and supplemental water.

For more information about choosing plants, use the plants listed in the Babcock Ranch Landscape Design Guidelines “Plant List: Residential Lot Typicals”, or contact our UF | IFAS Extension Service for Charlotte County.

In order to maintain access and sightlines to sidewalks and roads, all plants and tree branches encroaching from private properties and verge landscaping need to be regularly trimmed.

References

Babcock Ranch Landscape Design Guidelines “Plant List: Residential Lot Typicals” for plant material allowed – minimum container size, height, caliper, and spacing.

Resources:

The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook

UF | IFAS Extension Service for Charlotte County
http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/charlotte/

University of Florida Living Green IFAS Extension
http://livinggreen.ifas.ufl.edu/landscaping/mulch.html

The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) Homeowner Program
https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/homeowner.htm

Florida-Friendly Landscape Maintenance
https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/community_association_kit.htm

UF | IFAS Gardening Solutions Mulch
http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/planting/mulch.html
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UF | IFAS Gardening Solutions Rain Gardens
http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/types-of-gardens/rain-gardens.html
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VERGE PLANTINGS (Babcock)

Established Verges (after planted 1 year)

Love Grass and Perennial Peanut
Plant ground cover
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Sunshine Mimosa groundcover to edge of curb eliminates use of mulch

New Verges (within 6 months of planting)
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Muhly Grass planted closer to edge of curb

Muhly Grass planted further from edge of curb