Azaleas, camellias and roses are the big three in popularity among flowering shrubs in the New Orleans area. All three require high maintenance, they need raised well-drained beds of acid soil, watering during dry periods, mulching, fertilization, and an insect and disease program.

But they are the most rewarding of local plants, says Dwight S. Hall, area horticulturist with the Louisiana State University Agricultural Extension Service. For one thing, they come in such a variety of form and blossom colors.

Best planting time for azaleas and camellias is November through February, says Hall. Planting time for roses—barerooted or container-grown, is December or January, he says.

Azaleas and camellias like filtered light—they do well under pine trees, for example. With azaleas, you can choose between the dwarf (Kurume) type or large-side, (Indica) type. Flowers come in singles or doubles, and the flower colors range from pink to red white and purple.

The Sasanqua

Camellias include the very popular japonica species and the sasanqua species. The sasanqua is used more as a hedge or screen and has easily shattered blooms of short duration. With the japonicas, so grand for cutting, you have a choice of doubles or semi-doubles.

In New Orleans, roses do best with morning sun and afternoon shade, Hall advises. This is because of humidity and heat. In North Louisiana, which has dry heat and cold, they can take full sun.

Barerooted rose bushes should be planted as soon as they arrive, he adds. You can stand the plants in water, with only the roots covered, several hours or overnight before planting, however. A big mistake many people make, he says, is planting the bushes too deep. The graft union should be above ground, he warns. You have a choice of miniature, floribunda, grandiflora, or hybrid tea, the latter the most popular as it is so showy and nice for cutting.

Other flowering shrubs which do well in this area and should be planted from November through February are: abelia, althea, bottle brush, duranta, flowering pomegranate, gardenia, hydrangea, primrose jasmine, mahonia, mock orange, Japanese Magnolia, Magnolia fuscata, oleander, pittosporum, yucca, pineapple guava, pyracantha, camellia sasanqua, sweet olive, Texas sage, and viburnum. In North Louisiana, deutzia, Japanese quince, forsythia, spiraea, and winter honeysuckle are recommended.