The Cover:

One of the many wonderful things about New Orleans is its azaleas. When Yankees are still shivering in the frozen North, denizens of the Crescent City are surrounded by the vibrant pinks and purples of an early spring. If you'd like to know about the care and feeding of these flowers, be sure to read Cultivating Beauty, on Page 24. Staff photographer G. E. Arnold made the cover photograph.

Staff Chaff:

Pat Phillips, who writes Today's Living, Garden Guide and other home and garden features, has been a weekly contributor to DIXIE Roto for more than three years. This week's contributions are Cultivating Beauty (on Page 24) and February Garden Guide (on Page 22).

Her association with The Times-Picayune goes back to her college days, when she served briefly as the young people's editor. Before her graduation from Newcomb, she was a sports editor of the Tulane Hullabaloo, the campus newspaper. In fact, she was the first girl to hold such a job—and she also served as Newcomb editor of the Hullabaloo and of Jambalaya, Tulane's yearbook. More recently, she was editor of Lagniappe, the magazine of the Junior League of New Orleans.

Pat is married to Thomas N. Bernard, a New Orleans businessman. They have three children: Thomas Jr., 18; Ralph, 15, and Camille, 8. Though she describes herself as "just a housewife," her free-lance activities for DIXIE keep her busy five days a week. She keeps a running file of homes to be written about in Today's Living, and spends several hours, sometimes longer, in each. "As one lady said, I 'interview the house,' " she explains.

After the interview, she goes over fine points with architects and decorators, and if there are antiques in the home, she checks out each to authenticate the period.

"The decorators are just wonderful," she says; often she spends hours on the telephone checking her material with them.

"New Orleans has no set pattern," she comments. "All the homes are different. I love seeing them and meeting the people who own them."
Cultivating Beauty

By Pat Phillips

When in bloom, the azalea has little competition from other flowers for spectacular beauty. Their first showing harbingers spring in midwinter.

New Orleans parks, parkways, avenues and boulevards planted with azaleas provide a yearly show of beauty in early spring. Also, they are planted along with trees and shrubs for brilliant hues in the landscape in private gardens.

Planting azaleas is one of the most satisfactory ways to color gardens in winter and spring. The name, azalea, is a horticultural one. Botanically they belong to the rhododendron family. Most azaleas planted in the New Orleans area are evergreen. The native azalea, a popular landscape plant, is deciduous. Flowers appear before the leaves unfold.

In preparing azalea beds for planting, a good soil mixture is three-fourths loam and one-fourth peat moss. Azaleas have shallow root systems, need water and must be mulched against summer’s heat and winter’s cold. Acid soil is best for azalea. Local nurseries sell a suitable premixed camellia-azalea soil.

Azaleas grow best in an area that receives partial shade. They need beds that provide good drainage. They need an abundance of water—for they will wilt rapidly if not watered in dry weather. “Azaleas are different from other plants,” advises Mrs. Lee Guillot, 6375 West End. “They will tell you when they are thirsty—they flop and wilt.”

There are several groups of azaleas with many beautiful plants among the proved varieties. According to Mrs. Guillot, the two most common varieties planted in the New Orleans area are the Indica and the Kurume. The Belgian type azaleas are lovely and are becoming more and more popular. Mrs. Guillot adds, “These types are wonderful as pot plants and always bloom except for midsummer and sometimes even then.”

Plants of the Indica type grow very large. Of this group the Formosa variety is hardy and fast growing. It grows tall and spreads with large flowers—light purple with a pink cast. It’s one of the easiest varieties to grow. Pride of Mobile is the most popular of the pink azaleas. It’s watermelon-pink in color and blooms in mid-season. If trimmed properly, it will grow as wide as tall. Elegans, one of the first to bloom, is pink, a shade lighter than Pride of Mobile. Elegans is a straggier grower and should be kept clipped to stay full.

Fielders White is a large Indica type. One of the better whites, it produces large flowers, and is a compact grower. President Clay is one of the most popular azaleas in off-red. A vigorous grower, it is a hardy plant.

The Kurumes are dwarf azaleas. Snow, a white compact grower, is popular. Salmon Beauty is pale salmon pink; Coral Bells has shell-pink flowers and is one of the most popular of the Kurume varieties. Christmas Cheer is bright red with small dark green foliage. New Kurumes include Himi-Kagami, a white flower striped with pink, and Kintaiya, a white flower edged with orange.

Belgian azaleas start blooming in November and bloom until midsummer. These lovely plants—particularly red varieties—tolerate a lot of cold weather. They come in almost all colors, are semi-dwarf growers with mostly large double flowers.