



*Dave and Sue Fenili Earn DAR Award
for Leadership in Conservation*

Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) of the Greenwich Tea Burning Chapter member Valerie Baron nominated Sue and Dave Fenili for outstanding leadership in conservation. Recently, they were presented with the award.

Sue has served on our board since 2005. Along with her husband, Dave, she has been involved for nearly 30 years in devoting time to Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, Inc. (CU). Even before her connection with CU, Sue had been introducing students and adults to the wonders of the natural world that surrounds them, and for the past 10 years she has dedicated about 150 hours annually to the CU volunteer corps. She has also augmented her commitment by recruiting and organizing countless other volunteers. Although people know Sue because of her outgoing nature, Dave's more reserved demeanor sometimes prevents people from noticing his continual dedication to the very same endeavors. As a retired marketing manager, he has advised on promotional aspects, including both marketing and educational materials. The financial proceeds from these activities power the CU conservation programs.

Sue initiated a partnership between CU and the YMCA Camp Merrywood as a way for CU volunteers to enhance the campers' program with nature-based activities. Since 2011 Sue has involved

and coordinated retired and working teachers and professionals from various ecological disciplines in devoting a morning to a lesson plan and activity at the camp. Thanks to her work, most weeks in the camp's summer program have at least two such visitations, and each year the program has grown.

She and Dave have helped with children's activities at all the many festivals where we participate each year. These include but are not limited to WheatonArts Ecofest, Bay Day, Purple Martin Festival, and the Eagle Festival. They are big fans of CU's Annual Frog Slog (since 2006) and Monarch Mania (since 2009). Both have been an integral part of CU activities such as Elevate, a summer enrichment program in Vineland that fosters healthy activities in the summer for its participants. They have served as nature guides for eight years during our Wild About Cumberland activities, an event that combines indoor lessons with an out-of-door guided hike, introducing more than 400 students each year to the wonders of nature.

Further, they have been involved in CU habitat/conservation projects. These include activities like nesting box

programs, trail maintenance, tree plantings, clean-ups at nature areas, and community gardening. Their efforts are not limited to youth but also encompass adult and family education. They are both teachers and learners, constantly educating themselves about the natural world, attending and adding enthusiasm to our many hikes and paddles, and engaging the other participants in their explorations. Sue has lectured and presented travelogues to our membership. She has acted as a docent for the Purple Martin Festival's attendees since 2005. And since 2006, annually they have prepared a meal for the International Shorebird Recovery Team members; attendance at each dinner is often 30-40 people.

Beyond CU the Fenilis have been engaged in many other environmental activities and community endeavors. Sue has served for many years on the Vineland Environmental Commission. In connection with that she and her husband Dave have planted and staked numerous young trees in their city. They have given countless hours to Vineland's Natural Areas clean-ups, habitat enhancements, and wildlife management and maintenance. Many years ago Sue also spearheaded an

environmental group called Kids Against Pollution, which successfully highlighted problem areas in Vineland and looked for ways to resolve them. Her efforts gained broader attention and she was invited to sail with Pete Seeger on his sloop, Clearwater - certainly a highlight in a long life dedicated to conservation!

Winter Delights

One of my favorite winter gift plants is the elegant cyclamen. With just a little care, this plant will return each fall for years of beauty. I love the rich jewel-like colors of the blooms as they float above the deep green often-variegated leaves. These plants like the coolness of a north window and will bloom from now well into spring.

The flowers of cyclamen look like vivid butterflies straining to fly away from the plant. Old legends say that butterflies are but scraps left over when God cut out the petals of flowers. The cyclamen blooms never made it to fly but were forever attached to the plant's lovely foliage. This is an accurate description of the blooms. They are held high above the foliage, and face downward, but the petals reverse,

pointing upward to give the blossoms a look resembling butterflies in flight.

I like the dark red blooms best, but others might favor the pink, white, magenta, or lavender. The round and heart-shaped leaves are marbled in shades of light green or gray on a very deep hunter green background. The foliage and blooms come from a corm very similar to a bulb.

If you've just purchased or been given a gift of a cyclamen for the holidays, follow these guidelines to enjoy it year after year:

- Keep it cool—55-60 degrees F. Place plant near a northern window to allow for indirect light it needs while in bloom.
- I like to put them in clay pots so that I can water well and not worry about the corm rotting. It's a good idea to set the pot on a plate of wet pebbles for extra humidity. Remember to keep soil moist while the plant is in bloom. If you allow the plant to dry out for too long, the blooms will droop.
- When watering, use tepid water. Try to pour all around the inside of the pot instead of directly over the corm.

- Always remove faded blooms at their point of origin. Fertilize with a dilute solution during growth periods but when leaves begin to fade, stop fertilizing, and gradually reduce water, allowing the corm to go dormant. I usually put my plants out on a cool porch in May and water until the summer heat causes the leaves to yellow and disappear. Then the soil can become dry from time to time and the plant can rest until the coolness of fall. This dormancy should last for six to eight weeks. Those on my porch do this naturally and are ready to be brought back in to winter in my windows.
- It's a good idea to remove the corm from the pot and replant in fresh potting soil every so often. Leave 1/3 to 1/2 of the top portion of the corm protruding above the soil surface. When new leaves begin to form, begin watering again, and fertilize once a month until flower buds form.

Another popular plant is a Christmas cactus in full bloom. Many people give and receive this plant because it is easy to grow, has long-lasting blooms and does well in most homes. Although red is the most popular during the holiday season these interesting plants come in

orange shades, a peachy yellow, white and many hues of pink and lavender. The cascading stems are often covered with long-lasting blooms.

Like most blooming plants this one will keep its blossoms longer in cool temperatures. It needs a well-lit location away from drafts and heat vents, fireplaces or other sources of hot air.

Poor watering practices seem to be the reason for most problems with Christmas cactus. Since this plant is a tropical type cactus it is not quite as drought tolerant as some think. But being a succulent plant it can store a reasonable quantity of water in the leaves. You should water it thoroughly when the top half of the soil in the pot feels dry to the touch. Don't allow it to sit in excess water, but be sure it runs out of the bottom of the pot so that all the roots are watered. The length of time between watering will vary with air temperature, amount of light, season and humidity.

Christmas cactus will grow in low light but more blooms are produced on plants that have been exposed to a

good light source in winter. Keep plants in a sunny window indoors.

Give Christmas cactus long uninterrupted dark periods, about 12 hours each night, in late summer and fall. That is why it is good to put them outdoors in summer. Buds set in midOctober and the plants are usually in full bloom by the holidays. The longer they're out, the better since the long period of darkness at night is what sets buds for holiday bloom.

The plants can be repotted when they become pot bound; use a well-drained potting soil like pro-mix that has white flecks of perlite in it. Combine two parts potting soil with one part clean sand or perlite.

A Christmas cactus, if trimmed back after blooms are gone, will likely branch out. The ends of the stems you trim off with a sharp knife can be rooted in moist potting soil if you want to propagate new plants. These cuttings make great holiday gifts the following year and often have blooms on them if allowed to summer outdoors.

Add a Christmas cactus in your sunny window now for years of enjoyment.

— Lorraine Grochowski-Kiefer,
tripleoaks.com