



# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

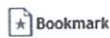
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## Life

Home > Life



### Drought busters

## Ventura nursery offers thousands of cactuses and succulents

BY MARILYN MCMAHON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER  
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As the drought continues in Santa Barbara and across the state, homeowners seeking new alternatives to landscape their gardens are discovering that cactus and succulents are providing an attractive solution.

They're also finding that Ventura Cactus & Succulents on North Ventura Avenue just down the road has a fantastic selection.

"I have about 18,000 to 20,000," said the owner, Abdi Niv. "I grow them from seed, from stems and from leaves. Anything I don't have, I buy. There are more than 5,000 kinds of succulents, and I have about 300 to 400 of them."

Although tucked between two businesses, the nursery is not hard to find. Just look for the small green house with thousands of the plants in the front yard behind a lime green metal fence about 6 feet high. There are thousands more in the spacious backyard.

One of the first things Mr. Niv did after buying the property a year ago was paint the exterior of the house green with lime green trim on the windows and doors to match many of the plants.

While dealing with customers from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, Mr. Niv is easily visible in his bright green T-shirt and John Deere baseball cap, which he was wearing while chatting with the News-Press on a recent morning.

"Green goes with my business," he said, smiling.

Asked about the difference between cactuses and succulents, he explained that cactus is one family of succulents.

"Any plants that can store water in their stems and leaves is a succulent. Some can store water for a week, some for years. One

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Ventura Cactus & Succulents in Ventura has thousands of the plants on display in the front yard and backyard of a residential property.

CARMEN SMYTH/NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS



The nursery is owned by Abdi Niv, a retired contractor, above

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cactus, I forgot about for two years, and it was still alive. This makes them easy to care for and a water-friendly solution in dry areas such as California," Mr. Niv said.

In Tehran, Iran, where he was born, there was always a problem with water shortage, according to Mr. Niv, whose family moved to Vienna, Austria, for two years when he was 10.

"That's where I became interested in cactuses. The houses were very small with no yards. The plants were in window boxes," he recalled. "Yes, they had cactuses in Vienna, which people find hard to believe."

After moving back to Tehran, he graduated from the Iran University of Science and Technology with a degree in mechanical engineering and owned a contracting business until 1978 when he moved to Los Angeles.

"It was a forced immigration because of the revolution when the Shah of Iran was overthrown," said Mr. Niv, 69, who divides his time between Ventura and Agoura Hills, where he lives with his wife, Parvin Niv. The couple have three grown children and one grandchild.

Following his retirement as a contractor at the age of 65, he decided to pursue his love of gardening and began looking for a business location close to the ocean and his home in the Los Angeles area.

Ventura Cactus & Succulents became a reality about a year ago.

"One of the reasons I started the business is because of the drought, and for the first time in my life, I am doing something I enjoy doing. I never did like contracting," he said.

The nursery also stocks vertical gardens, wreaths and numerous other mediums used for planting and decor.

Prices range from \$2 to \$500.

Choosing unique containers for the plants seems to bring Mr. Niv as much joy as growing them.

"Anything you have, you can use as a container or decoration," said Mr. Niv.

Like the child's Jeep that is covered with succulents near the entrance.

Or the Tiffany look-alike light fixture that once hung from a ceiling. He turned it upside down, put plants in the bowl, and the rod is now used as the stand.

"The Jeep belonged to a friend's child, and when he outgrew it, my friend was going to get rid of it. I said, 'Give it to me,'" said Mr. Niv, whose wife finds many of the unusual containers at thrift shops.

The fledgling nursery is attracting customers from all over the country who learn about it on Facebook and the website, [www.venturacactusandsucculents.com](http://www.venturacactusandsucculents.com).

"Usually, they are middle-aged, but I'm surprised at how many younger people, under the age of 25, are coming. I enjoy working with them," said Mr. Niv.

Does he have a favorite type of plant among the many thousands he tends?

Mr. Niv smiled and said, "That's like asking me



There are 18,000 to 20,000 plants at the site, which Abdi Niv grows from seeds, stems and leaves.

"Anything you have, you can use as a container or decoration," said Mr. Niv, whose wife finds many items at thrift

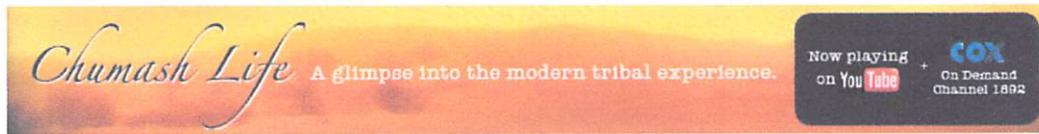
to choose my favorite child."

shops.

email: [mmcmahon@newspress.com](mailto:mmcmahon@newspress.com)

**FYI**

Ventura Cactus & Succulents, 1166 N. Ventura Ave. in Ventura, is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. For more information, call 755-5119, email [abdiniv@gmail.com](mailto:abdiniv@gmail.com) or visit [www.venturacactusandsucculents.com](http://www.venturacactusandsucculents.com).



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