

## NIGER SEED

*Guizotia abyssinica*



Photo: Tracey Slotta  
U.S.A. Department of  
Agriculture

Niger is an erect, stout, branched annual herb, grown for its edible seed and oil. It was first cultivated in the highlands of Ethiopia, but is now grown in other parts of that country. Other commonly used names include: noog (Ethio-Semitic ኑግ *nūg*); nyjer, or niger seed; ramtil or ramtilla; inga seed; and blackseed.

The seed, technically a fruit called an achene, is often sold as bird seed as it is a favourite of many finches, especially the Goldfinch and Greenfinch. It is indispensable when keeping the Red Hooded Siskin, *Carduelis cucullata*, as Niger and crushed Sunflower are the staples of this species' diet. In some sections of the bird seed market, Niger is often sold, or referred to, as thistle seed. However, this is a hang-over from the early marketing of the seed, when the word 'thistle' was used to take advantage of the finches' preference for thistle.

Niger is quite expensive as it is imported from Ethiopia and/or India and must be heat sterilized to prevent the plant from becoming established as an invasive species. Sterilization also kills the seed of the invasive parasitic weed "dodder" which sometimes contaminate Niger shipments.

In the southern parts of India it is used in cooking. In Karnataka and Maharashtra, Niger seeds (called "Uchellu" and "Karale" in the Kannada and Marathi languages respectively) are used to make a dry chutney which is used as an accompaniment to breads. Niger is also used as a spice in some curries.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

### AND WE THINK WE HAVE PROBLEMS WITH PREDATORS



The following is an extract from an article by the proprietors of a commercial quail breeding ranch in California. Many species of quail, including King Quail, are cage (rather than aviary) bred, and the eggs shipped all over the U.S.A. In the non breeding season stock is held in outside holding pens.

"Also worth mentioning are predatory wildlife problems. We have had more than our share this winter, and because of it, our spring season will get off to a slow start, but we hope to be in full swing again by early summer. Outdoor pens should have wire buried under the ground to prevent predators, such as skunks, raccoons, opossums, fox, coyotes, rats, domestic cats and weasels from digging under. If that fails, a single strand of electric wire fencing set about four inches off the ground all the way around the pens might do the trick. To deter owls and hawks, we keep a radio playing all the time (stations with 24 hour talk shows seem to work best). As for bobcats and Mountain Lions, we are still searching for answers. We almost had a handle on the problem, but with the new trapping laws, we are back to square one. The big cats tend to tear through the pen wire to get at the birds."