

# Chip Notes



## *Just the Seed Facts, Ma'am* **Nyjer® and Thistle: Myth Buster**

It's time to set the record straight on the most misunderstood seed used in wild bird food – Nyjer seed. Myth #1: Nyjer seed is thistle. Truth: Nyjer seed is NOT thistle. Thistle is the common name for a group of flowering plants, many of which are found in North America. Nyjer, on the other hand, is a plant (*Guizotia abyssinica*) of the Indian subcontinent that is commercially grown in India, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Myanmar (Burma). The seeds contain up to 40% oil and are a primary source of vegetable oil in the region. A portion of the annual harvest is exported to North America to be used in bird food. Why all the confusion over a name? Initially it may have been given the unfortunate name thistle due to the tiny seeds or that it attracted goldfinches and siskins who also love the seeds of the thistle family. The Wild Bird Feeding Industry has registered the name, Nyjer® Seed, as a way to distance it from thistle and emphasize the correct pronunciation. You will notice on our bags and printed materials that we use the WBF's "Nyjer® Seed."

When it appears on our ingredient lists, we use the USDA's required description, *Guizotia abyssinica/niger*. Myth #2: Nyjer seed is sterilized to keep it from becoming another introduced, non-native plant in the U.S. Truth: The USDA requested that the industry develop a plan to assure that the seed of dodder, a parasitic weed found in the growing region, be removed prior to offering Nyjer seed as bird food. The size, shape, and density of the crop seed and weed seed were so similar, that the only feasible option was to heat-treat the entire seed mass to render the dodder seed "non-viable." The process meets the government's requirement without affecting the palatability or attractiveness of the Nyjer seed. Myth #3: Nyjer seed is expensive. Truth: Nyjer seed is one of the best values in your wild bird department. The seed count per pound is well over 100,000 seeds. When Nyjer seed is offered in a Nyjer tube with tiny openings, finches can only remove a seed or two at a time. Your customer enjoys many beautiful views for the price paid.



**Nyjer®**  
(*Guizotia abyssinica/niger*)



**Thistle**  
(*Cirsium avense*)