

Cauliflower

Management Highlights

- Target pH: 6.5
- Split N applications to increase N use-efficiency in cauliflower. Apply a small amount at planting and the remainder in two sidedress applications -- the first 2-3 weeks after planting and the second, later in the season, if needed.
- Use a B soil test or apply B annually at recommended rates to prevent deficiency in the crop.
- Apply 0.2 lbs actual Mo/ac with in a broadcast fertilizer to avoid Mo deficiency in the crop.

Yield Goals

Yield of cauliflower is influenced by many factors beyond soil test results and fertilizer application. Cultivar selection, planting date, weather condition, soil type and water-holding capacity, weed, insect and disease pressure and crop management practices are just a few. *For that reason, the University of Delaware does not use yield goals in determining nutrient recommendations for vegetable crops at the present time. Instead, recommended rates are designed to produce maximum economic yields of high market quality a good to average year.*

Growers should use these nutrient recommendations along with field history data, their knowledge of specific crop requirements, their management plans, and conditions from the current growing season to develop an appropriate fertilizer program for the crop.

Soil pH and Liming

The target pH for cauliflower on most Delaware soils is 6.5. Soils that are high in organic matter ("black" soils) have a lower target pH (5.6) because organic matter moderates some of the negative effects of excessive soil acidity (e.g., aluminum toxicity). The lime recommendation for a specific field is calculated

from the soil pH and buffer pH measurements using the steps outlined in *Calculating the Lime Requirement – Chapter 3, Section 3.4*. Maintain soil pH in the proper range to prevent deficiency of micronutrients such as molybdenum.

In most cases, the lime requirement can be met by either calcitic or dolomitic limestone. When soil test Mg is less than 38 FIVs, use dolomitic limestone to prevent Mg deficiency and increase soil Mg concentrations.

Nitrogen Management

The University of Delaware recommends a total nitrogen (N) application of **100-150 lbs N/ac** per growing season for cauliflower. The total rate should be split into three treatments and applied according to the schedule in Table 1. Under specific circumstances such as when weather conditions have been conducive to loss of N, the sidedress N rate can be increased, *but the total N rate applied should not exceed 150 lbs N/ac.*

Fertilizer N rates should be reduced when planting into legume cover crops or when manure has been applied. To calculate the adjustment, see *Nitrogen Rate Adjustments – Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1.2*.

Table 1. Nitrogen recommendations for cauliflower.

Growth Stage	Application Method	N Rate (lbs N /ac)
At or prior to planting	Broadcast and disk in	50 - 75
2-3 weeks after planting	Sidedressed	25 - 50
Later in the season, if needed due to weather	Sidedressed	25 - 50

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Phosphorus Management

Yield-limiting phosphorus (P) deficiency is rarely a concern on Delaware soils. Long-term applications of fertilizers and manures have resulted in P accumulations on many soils that are capable of supplying crop needs for several years with no further additions.

To determine whether P fertilization is necessary for a specific field, conduct a routine soil test. University of Delaware P recommendations for cauliflower are dependent upon the soil test P value and the P needs of the crop. A summary of those P recommendations is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Phosphorus recommendations for cauliflower.

Application Method and Timing	P Index Value			
	0-25	26-50	51-100	101 +
	----- lbs P ₂ O ₅ / ac -----			
Broadcast and disk in prior to planting	200	100	50	0

Potassium Management

The need for potassium (K) fertilization of cauliflower is best determined by a routine soil test. Potassium recommendations are based on the soil test K value and the K needs of the crop. A summary of University of Delaware K rates for cauliflower is given below in Table 3.

Table 3. Potassium recommendations for cauliflower.

Application Method and Timing	K Index Value			
	0-25	26-50	51-100	101 +
	----- lbs K ₂ O / ac -----			
Broadcast and disk in prior to planting	200	100	50	0

Calcium and Magnesium Management

Calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg) needs of cauliflower are usually met through routine liming. If the soil test Mg value is low (e.g., less than 38 FIVs) and liming is indicated, use dolomitic limestone to raise soil pH and increase soil Mg. If, however, liming is

not necessary but Mg fertilization is still indicated, apply soluble Mg as Mg sulfate or Mg chloride to increase soil Mg. Appropriate application rates are given below in Table 4.

Table 4. Application rates for soluble Mg as a function of Mg fertility index value.

Mg Index Value								
0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
----- lbs soluble Mg / ac -----								
80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0

Boron Management

Boron (B) deficiency may occur in cauliflower grown on Delaware soils. The best way to determine the need for B fertilization is with a soil test. Interpretation of and application rates based on the B soil test are summarized in Table 5. In the absence of a soil test, apply 1-3 lbs/ac of actual B in a blended, broadcast fertilizer or as a soil or foliar spray. *Avoid over-application of B to prevent plant injury from B toxicity.*

Table 5. Interpretation of the B soil test for cauliflower.

Soil Test Rating	Soil Concentration	Recommended Application
	--- lbs B/ac ---	--- lbs B/ac ---
Low	0.00 - 0.70	3.0
Medium	0.71 - 1.40	1.5
Optimum	> 1.40	0

Molybdenum Management

Molybdenum (Mo) deficiency may develop in cauliflower when grown on soils with a pH of 5.4 or lower. To prevent molybdenum deficiency, maintain soil pH at **6.5** through proper liming and apply 0.2 lbs actual Mo/ac as sodium molybdate in a blended, broadcast fertilizer. If Mo deficiency is suspected, it can be confirmed through tissue testing of the affected plants. Confirmed deficiency can usually be corrected in season by application of a soil or foliar spray at a rate of 3 ounces actual Mo/ac.

Manganese Management

Manganese (Mn) deficiency may occur in cauliflower grown on Delaware soils, most often as a result of overliming soils that are naturally low in Mn. The University of Delaware Soil Testing Program uses an availability index based on the soil test Mn value and soil pH to predict the likelihood of Mn deficiency. That availability index is calculated using the equation:

$$MnAI = 101.7 - (15.2 \times pH) + (2.11 \times ST-Mn)$$

where:

- MNAI = Mn availability index
- pH = water pH of the soil
- ST-Mn = Mehlich 3 soil test Mn in lbs/ac.

Table 3-14 in *Chapter 3, Section 3.5.5.2 (Manganese Management)* gives a summary of MNAI values for various soil pH-soil test Mn combinations. Interpretations of the Mn availability index for cauliflower are given below in Table 6.

Table 6. Interpretation of the Mn availability index for cauliflower.

MnAI Value	Interpretation
Less than 12	Mn deficiency is likely at this soil pH and Mn concentration.
12 or greater	Mn deficiency is unlikely.

Suspected Mn deficiency can be confirmed by tissue analysis. Confirmed deficiency situations can be corrected in season by foliar applications of Mn of 1 to 2 lbs/ac of actual Mn as Mn sulfate, Mn oxide or Mn chelate. If deficiency is predicted by the availability index or was observed during the previous growing season, it can be prevented by an application of 8-10 lbs/ac of actual Mn in the fertilizer band. Band applications of acid-forming fertilizer, which lower the pH in the area of plant roots, may correct Mn deficiency without the addition of Mn fertilizer.

Other Nutrients

No other nutrients are known to be limiting to cauliflower production in Delaware.

Additional Information

See Soil Test Notes 1, 4, 5 and 7 (Appendix 7) and **Extension Bulletin 137: Commercial Vegetable Production Recommendations - Delaware 2003** (Kee et al., 2003) for additional information concerning nutrient management of cauliflower.