

## Muskmelons

### Management Highlights

- Target pH: 6.5
- Split N applications to increase N use efficiency. When a second harvest is desired, apply additional N following the first harvest of crown fruit.
- Use a B soil test or apply B annually at recommended rates to avoid deficiency in the crop.

### Yield Goals

Yield of muskmelons is influenced by many factors beyond soil test results and fertilizer application. Cultivar selection, planting date, early vegetative growth, weather conditions, 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 in a good to average year.*

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

### Soil pH and Liming

The target pH for muskmelons on most Delaware soils is 6.5. Soils that are higher in organic matter ("black" soils) have a lower target pH (5.6) because organic matter moderates some of the 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*. Avoid

overliming in order to prevent deficiency of micro-nutrients such as manganese.

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 nitrogen (N) recommendations for muskmelon production are dependent upon the cultural practices being used. In all cases, 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*.

### Traditional Culture

In traditional culture, the University of Delaware recommends a total nitrogen (N) application of 75 - 100 lbs N/ac per growing season for muskmelons. The total N rate should be split into 3 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 100 lbs N/ac*.

**Table 1. Nitrogen recommendations for muskmelon production using traditional culture.**

Application Time	Application Method	N Rate (lbs N /ac)
Prior to or at planting	Broadcast and disked in	25 - 50
At planting	Band placed with planter	25
When vines start to run	Sidedressed	25 - 50

## Commercial Vegetable Crops

### Plastic Mulch

When plastic mulch is used *without drip/trickle irrigation*, the N rate should be increased to **100 - 150 lbs N/ac**. Broadcast all recommended fertilizer (N, P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> and K<sub>2</sub>O) and disk in prior to mulch installation and planting.

### Drip / Trickle Fertilization

Prior to mulch installation, apply **50 lbs/ac N, P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> and K<sub>2</sub>O** and incorporate thoroughly into the soil. Install the drip / trickle irrigation lines and the plastic mulch.

Within one week of transplanting the muskmelons, begin apply a soluble fertilizer application at a rate of **50 lbs N, P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> and K<sub>2</sub>O/fertilized mulch acre**. A second fertilizer application at the same rate should be made when the first fruit set. A third application at the same rate should be applied about 2 weeks before harvest.

### 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 muskmelons are dependent upon the soil test P value and the P requirement of the crop. A summary of those P recommendations is given in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Phosphorus recommendations for muskmelons.**

Application Method and Timing	P Index Value			
	0-25	26-50	51-100	101 +
	----- lbs P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub> / ac -----			
Broadcast and disk in	125	75	25	0
Band place with planter	25	25	25	0

### Potassium Management

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

**Table 3. Potassium recommendations for muskmelons.**

Application Method and Timing	K Index Value			
	0-25	26-50	51-100	101 +
	----- lbs K <sub>2</sub> O / ac -----			
Broadcast and disk in	175	125	75	0
Band place with planter	25	25	25	0

### Calcium and Magnesium Management

Calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg) needs of muskmelons 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 muskmelons 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 **1-2 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.*

**Note:** When using drip / trickle fertilization, B may be applied at a rate of **0.50 lbs/ mulched fertilized acre** in each soluble fertilizer application, rather than as a pre-plant application.

**Table 5. Interpretation of the B soil test for muskmelons.**

Soil Test Rating	Soil Concentration --- lbs B/ac ---	Recommended Application --- lbs B/ac ---
Low	0.00 - 0.70	2.0
Medium	0.71 - 1.40	1.0
Optimum	> 1.40	0

### Manganese Management

Manganese (Mn) deficiency may occur in muskmelons 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 muskmelons are given below in Table 6.

**Table 6. Interpretation of the Mn availability index for muskmelons.**

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 1-2 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 muskmelon 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 muskmelons.