

Sweet Potatoes

Management Highlights

- Target pH: 5.2
- Split N applications to increase N use-efficiency in potatoes. Apply a small amount at planting and the remainder when the vines start to run.

Yield Goals

Yield of sweet potatoes 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 in 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 sweet potatoes on Delaware soils is 5.2. 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 recommends a total nitrogen (N) application of **50-75 lbs N/ac** per growing season for sweet potatoes. An initial application of **25 lbs N/ac** should be broadcast and disked in at or prior to planting. An additional **25-50 lbs N/ac** should be sidedressed when vines start to run. The higher N rate should be used on sandy soils where the risk of leaching loss of N is greater or for fields with greater yield potential.

The total N rate applied 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*.

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 sweet potatoes are dependent upon the soil test P value and the P requirement of the crop. A summary of P recommendations is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Phosphorus recommendations for sweet potatoes

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

Commercial Vegetable Crops

Potassium Management

The need for potassium (K) fertilization of sweet potatoes 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 sweet potatoes is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Potassium recommendations for sweet potatoes.

Application Method and Timing	K Index Value			
	0-25	26-50	51-100	101 +
	----- lbs K ₂ O / ac -----			
Broadcast and disk in at or prior to planting	300	200	100	0

Calcium and Magnesium Management

Calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg) needs of sweet potatoes 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 3.

Table 3. 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

Manganese Management

Manganese (Mn) deficiency may occur in sweet potatoes 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 sweet potatoes are given below in Table 4.

Table 4. Interpretation of the Mn availability index for sweet potatoes.

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 sweet potato 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 sweet potatoes.