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Northern Idaho fertilizer guide

Spring barley

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The following fertilizer guidelines were developed through research conducted by the University of Idaho and Washington State University. The guidelines are based on relationships between soil test data and yields of spring barley. The suggested fertilizer rates are designed to produce above-average yields if other factors such as pests, soil moisture, planting date, and stand are not limiting production. Thus, the fertilizer guidelines assume the use of sound management practices.

The suggested fertilizer rates will be accurate for your field if (1) soil samples are properly taken and represent the area to be fertilized and (2) the crop history you supply is complete and accurate. For assistance in obtaining a good soil sample, refer to EXT 704, *Soil Sampling*.

Nitrogen

Nitrogen (N) rates for spring barley depend upon previous fertilizer applications, soil type, level of soil organic matter, soil depth, length of growing season, pest control, and other management practices.

The amount of N fertilizer needed for optimum production also depends on the barley's intended use — malting or feed grain. The fertilizer rates recommended in this publication are for feed barley. To achieve desirable protein levels when growing malting barley, decrease the rates recommended here by 20 to 25 percent.

The amount of N fertilizer also depends on:

- The potential yield of the variety based on its historical yield in your location and good management.
- The amount of usable N in the soil profile. This includes mineralizable N released from organic matter during the growing season and inorganic N in the forms of nitrate (NO_3^-) and ammonium (NH_4^+).
- Total annual precipitation and other climatic factors.
- Density and vigor of plant stand.
- The use of yield-sustaining inputs such as fungicides to control diseases and plant growth regulators to reduce lodging.
- The type and yield of the previous crop.

In areas of low annual precipitation (18 inches or less), determine soil moisture in the profile and adjust N fertilizer rates accordingly. In these low-moisture areas and in areas with shallow soils (2 to 3 feet maximum depth), adjust the recommended N fertilizer rate to fit yield potential limited by available soil moisture.

Nitrogen fertilizer based on soil testing

Use the following equation to determine the amount of fertilizer N to apply to meet your crop's need:

$$\text{Fertilizer N needed} = \left(\begin{matrix}\text{N needed based on potential yield} \\ \text{(Table 1)}\end{matrix} + \begin{matrix}\text{N needed for residue breakdown} \\ \text{(Table 2)}\end{matrix}\right) - \left(\begin{matrix}\text{Mineralizable N} \\ \text{(Table 3)}\end{matrix} + \begin{matrix}\text{Soil test N} \\ \text{(Table 4)}\end{matrix}\right)$$

Nitrogen needed based on potential yield — Estimates of N needed to produce a crop of spring barley should be based on potential yield. This potential yield should be the long-term average yield for the selected field adjusted to reflect management changes that influence yield potential. Assume 4 pounds N per acre are required to produce 100 pounds spring barley with the optimum protein content for feed barley (Table 1).

Nitrogen needed for residue breakdown — Nitrogen is needed to break down straw from the previous cereal crop. Apply 15 pounds available N for each ton of straw incorporated into the soil up to 50 pounds N per acre (Table 2). Remember, 1 ton

Table 1. Total N need of spring barley based on potential yield.

Potential yield	N need
(lb/acre)	(lb/acre)
2,000	80
2,500	100
3,000	120
3,500	140
4,000	160

Note: Research has shown that 4 pounds N per acre are needed to produce each 100 pounds of barley.

Table 2. Nitrogen needed for cereal straw (residue) breakdown.

Residue	N to add
(tons)	(lb/acre)
0	0
0.5	7.5
1	15
2	30
3	45
4	50
More than 4	50

Note: One ton of residue is produced for each 20 bu of wheat or 1,400 lb of barley grain produced.

of residue is produced for each 20 bushels of wheat or 1,400 pounds of barley grain produced.

Mineralizable nitrogen — Soils vary in their capacities to release N from organic matter during the growing season. The rate or amount of N released depends on factors such as the amount of soil organic matter, past soil erosion, available soil moisture, and soil temperature during the growing season.

Four different mineralizable N release rates are used for northern Idaho soils (Table 3). Low N release rates are found on severely eroded clay knobs and hilltops, in cutover timberland soils, in soils in areas of low precipitation, in soils with low water-holding capacities, and in soils with low organic matter contents.

Table 3. Mineralizable N release rates for northern Idaho soils.

Organic matter content	Release rate	N released during growing season
(%)		(lb/acre)
Less than 2	Low	25
2 to 3	Medium	45
3 to 4	Moderately high	60
More than 4	High	75

Soil test nitrogen — The amount of available N in the soil can be evaluated most effectively with a soil test. Soil samples should represent the rooting depth of the crop because nitrate-nitrogen (NO_3-N) is mobile in soil. Spring barley is capable of removing N to a depth of 3 feet.

Soil test values include both NO_3-N and ammonium-nitrogen (NH_4-N). To convert soil test NO_3-N and NH_4-N values in parts per million (ppm) to pounds per acre, add the N values (ppm) for each foot of sampling depth and multiply by 4 (Table 4).

Table 4. Example of calculation to convert N soil test results in parts per million to pounds per acre.

	Soil test results				
Depth	NO_3-N	NH_4-N[1]	Total N	Factor	Total N[2]
(inches)	(ppm)	(ppm)	(ppm)		(lb/acre)
0 to 12	5	1	6	× 4	= 24
12 to 24	2	2	4	× 4	= 16
24 to 36	2	1	3	× 4	= 12
Total	9	4	13	× 4	= 52

[1]Ammonium (NH_4-N) content is usually low and is often not included in soil test analyses.
[2]ppm × 4 = lb/acre.

Nitrogen fertilizer — The calculation for N fertilizer needed is:

Total N needed (lb/acre) (Table 1 + Table 2)	_____
Minus mineralizable N (lb/acre) (Table 3)	– _____
Minus soil test N (lb/acre) (Table 4)	– _____
Equals N fertilizer needed (lb/acre)	= _____

For example, with a potential yield of 3,500 pounds per acre, 2.5 percent organic matter, no straw residue, and soil test values from the example in Table 4, you would need 43 pounds N per acre:

Total N needed (Table 1 + Table 2)	(140 + 0)	140
Minus mineralizable N (Table 3)	–	45
Minus soil test N (Table 4)	–	52
Equals N fertilizer needed	=	43

Nitrogen fertilizer based on the previous crop

You also can estimate the N fertilizer requirement on the basis of the previous crop. The values in Table 5 are generalized recommendations based on field experiments and observations of spring barley production following the production of various crops. *Note:* Fertility recommendations based only on the previous crop are not as accurate as recommendations based on good soil tests.

Table 5. Nitrogen fertilizer rates for spring barley based on potential yield and previous crop.

	Application rate		
Potential yield	Grain (residue returned)	Grain (residue removed), peas, lentils, fallow	Alfalfa or green manure crop
(lb/acre)	(lb/acre)	(lb/acre)	(lb/acre)
2,000	30 to 50	20 to 30	0 to 20
3,000	50 to 70	30 to 40	20 to 30
4,000	70 to 90	40 to 50	30 to 45

Note: The range in fertilizer rate values allows for varying levels of mineralizable N. Reduce application rates 20 to 25 percent for malting barley.

Phosphorus

Spring barley has a relatively low phosphorus (P) demand, but an adequate amount must be available for use by the plant (Table 6). Thus, if the soil level of P is low, the crop will respond to applied P.

Table 6. Phosphorus fertilizer rates for spring barley based on a soil test.

Soil test P (0 to 12 inches)[1]		Application rate[2]	
NaOAc	$NaHCO_3$	P_2O_5	P
(ppm)	(ppm)	(lb/acre)	(lb/acre)
0 to 2	0 to 8	60	26
2 to 3	8 to 10	40	18
3 to 4	10 to 12	20	9
More than 4	More than 12	0	0

[1]Soil test P can be determined by two procedures — sodium acetate (NaOAc) and sodium bicarbonate ($NaHCO_3$). Use the column indicated by your soil test report.
[2]$P_2O_5 \times 0.44 = P$, or $P \times 2.29 = P_2O_5$.

Phosphorus should be either banded or incorporated into the seedbed before or at planting. Broadcast-plowdown, broadcast-seedbed incorporated, and drill-banding are commonly used methods of application. Drill-banding P is usually the most efficient application method, allowing placement with, below, or to the side of the seed. Choose whichever application method is most convenient. *Note:* If the P material banded with the seed contains N, do *not* apply more than 20 pounds N per acre.

Potassium

Spring barley has a relatively low demand for potassium (K). Few soil samples have soil test values low enough to warrant the use of K fertilizer. Those that do are usually from eroded areas of hilltops, clay knobs, or both. Apply K fertilizer as needed according to a soil test (Table 7).

K should be incorporated into the seedbed before or at planting. Broadcast-plowdown, broadcast-seedbed incorporated, and drill-banding are effective methods of application. Drill-banded fertilizer can be placed with, below, or to the side of the seed. Choose whichever application method is most convenient. The total of N plus K (as K_2O) applied with the seed should not exceed 20 pounds per acre due to potential harm to the seed.

Table 7. Potassium fertilizer rates for spring barley based on a soil test.

Soil test K (0 to 12 inches)	Application rate[2]	
	K_2O	K
(ppm)	(lb/acre)	(lb/acre)
0 to 35	80	66
35 to 75	60	50
More than 75	0	0

[1]Sodium acetate extractable K.
[2]$K_2O \times 0.83 = K$, or $K \times 1.20 = K_2O$.

Sulfur

Sulfur (S) requirements for spring barley are influenced by soil texture, soil organic matter content, the previous crop, and fertilizer history. A soil testing less than 10 ppm SO_4-S should receive 15 to 20 pounds S per acre. Avoid using elemental S. Use a material containing sulfate. Sulfur deficiency appears as a yellowing of the plant early in the growing season and is visually indistinguishable from N deficiency. Have the soil tested if you suspect a deficiency.

Micronutrients and lime

Spring barley responses to micronutrients have been uncommon in northern Idaho. If you are in doubt, have the soil tested and consult the Extension agricultural agent in your county.

Try experimental lime applications on highly acid soils (less than pH 5.3) to determine whether the crop gives an economical response. Apply needed lime at a rate of 1 to 2 tons per acre and mix it well into the soil. For additional information see CIS 811, *The Relationship of Soil pH and Crop Yields in Northern Idaho.*

General comments

- Weeds, insects, diseases, and environmental stress can influence the effectiveness of a fertilizer program and reduce yields.
- Nitrogen applied to spring barley after the boot stage or at excessive rates can increase lodging hazard and produce higher protein levels.
- Early planting of spring barley usually produces higher yields; however, it can increase the potential for disease.
- Starter or pop-up fertilizers have had limited success. Starter fertilizers have been most effective when soils were cold and root growth could be stimulated by a readily available supply of both P and N.
- Avoid banding high amounts of fertilizer close to the seed. High amounts of N and K can result in salt damage during germination.
- Banding fertilizer improves N and P use efficiency. Consequently, if applying N, P, or both in a band, cut the recommended fertilizer application rates by 10 to 15 percent.

Further reading

CIS 811, *The Relationship of Soil pH and Crop Yields in Northern Idaho,* 35 cents

EXT 704, *Soil Sampling,* 50 cents

To order copies of these or other University of Idaho publications, contact the UI Cooperative Extension System office in your county or write to Agricultural Publications, Idaho Street, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83843-4196 or call (208) 885-7982.

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