

What Soil Amendments Do Onions Like?

Like all annual bulbs, onions (*Allium* spp.) are heavy phosphorous feeders and prefer soil amendments that are low in nitrogen and high in phosphorous, such as bone meal and rock phosphate. Onions also grow better in loose, loamy soil rather than heavy clay, so well-rotted compost is another good addition to an onion bed.

Fertilizer

When planting onions, loosen the soil to a depth of 12 inches and add 1 to 2 inches of compost. You can also add a dry fertilizer at this time. Commercial fertilizers list three numbers on the side of the package: the first number is the amount of nitrogen, the second is phosphorous and the third is potassium. If you are using 5-10-10 fertilizer, add 4 cups for every 5 feet of onions planted. For 8-16-16 fertilizer, add 1/2 cup per 5 feet, and for 10-10-10 add 1/4 cup.

Bone Meal

Bone meal is a natural soil amendment made from the steamed and ground up bones of animals. The amount of phosphorous in bone meal can range from 10 to 13 percent. Bone meal also has some nitrogen. Bone meal works well for all types of bulbs, including onions. Bone meal works more slowly than synthetic fertilizers, but it is considered organic and it is the most economical of the phosphorous-rich amendments. Apply 10 to 15 pounds of bone meal per 100 square feet of garden space.

Rock Phosphate

Phosphorous is also available in the form of rock phosphate. Rock phosphate amendments can be hard to find and expensive, and difficult to apply to the garden, so rock phosphate is not the best choice. Apply 10 to 15 pounds of rock phosphate per 100 square feet of garden space every five years.

Easy on the Nitrogen



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begin to die back and form bulbs. Too much nitrogen too late in the season can cause deformed bulbs.

Onions Like Loose Soil

You can add all the phosphorous you want, but if your soil is too heavy, it won't grow nice onions. Onions thrive in loose, light, loamy soil. Heavy clay makes them work too hard to form bulbs and stunts their growth. To improve the structure of your soil, spread 1 to 2 feet of ground leaves onto your garden bed in fall and work them into the soil to make it looser.

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- [Gardens Alive: Rock Your Garden With Rock Dust](#)
- [Vita Soil: Bone Meal Application](#)

About the Author



Maggie Fry began her writing career in 1986. She has written for publications including "Seattle Weekly" and the Rodale Institute's New Farm online magazine.

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