



## Pasture perfect

Pull out all the stops  
with free range poultry

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Which comes first? The chicken or the egg? Just before Easter my daughter came in to work raving about eggs from Ayton Farm in Rathdowney. My wife and I decided to visit and give their pasture-fed eggs a crack. Given all the publicity about free range vs caged, here was a winner. These eggs from Rathdowney are the duck's nuts and they come from happy, pasture-fed hens.

The same applies for chicken meat. Free range, corn fed, pasture raised, organic ... for decades, we have put up with battery-fed, tasteless chickens. Well, the humble chicken is returning to luxury status and not before time.

### Pasture-fed chicken with Middle Eastern-spiced rice

Extra virgin olive oil	Pinch saffron
2 fennel bulbs, each cut into 6 wedges	8 grates of whole nutmeg
Salt and freshly ground pepper	4 cloves
2 x No. 16 pasture-fed chickens, cut into 16 pieces	400g basmati rice
4 brown onions, sliced	1 litre chicken stock, hot
10 cloves garlic, finely sliced	½ cup sultanas
1 cinnamon stick	60g toasted pistachios
4 cardamom pods	½ cup mint leaves
1 tsp allspice	½ cup coriander leaves
	½ pomegranate, seeds only
	Zest and juice of 2 lemons

Preheat oven to 160C. Warm 1tsp olive oil in a large, heavy-based pan on a medium heat. Cook fennel wedges until nicely coloured, about 4-5 mins, and then set aside. Lightly season chicken pieces, add 1tbs olive oil to the pan and fry chicken for about 5 mins each side, until golden. Remove to a large tray. Do this in batches to avoid overcrowding the pan. Add 1tbs olive oil to the pan and cook onion until golden brown. Add garlic and cook for 2 mins and then remove to a medium bowl. Add 1tbs olive oil to the pan and then add spices, rice and a good pinch of salt. Cook on low for 1 min and then add chicken stock. Bring to the simmer. Place half the cooked onion in the base of an extra-large braising pan. Slowly pour in the hot rice and stock. Then add chicken pieces, skin side up, and the fennel. Scatter the sultanas over and then add the remaining onion. Cover with a lid or tight-fitting foil and place in oven for 30 mins. Remove from oven and rest for 5 mins. Remove foil and transfer chicken and fennel to individual plates. Fluff up the rice with a fork and mix through pistachios. Add a serve of rice to each plate, scattering with herbs and pomegranate seeds. Spoon lemon juice over the chicken pieces and fennel, and sprinkle with lemon zest. Serves 8.

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