

# Save the environment with these face masks made from abaca and buri

Published August 18, 2020, 5:52 PM

by [John Legaspi](#)

**You are helping local artisans, too!**



Apart from the rising Covid-19 cases, what's truly depressing in this pandemic is the amount of plastic and other waste we are producing as a result of the community quarantine. While we thought that staying in could somehow lessen the trash we make, the reality has become the total opposite. With more people relying on online shopping, their purchases come in one-time use plastic wraps and boxes that usually end up in the bin. To add to this are the plastic bags used in the early days of the lockdown period for donated goods.

Just last month, we learned that aside from cigarette butts and plastic, single-use face masks are [“slowly becoming a common sighting in the waters of Manila Bay.”](#) It is sad to think that something so essential for living right now can also be a cause of environmental pollution.

To help ease the problem about face mask disposal, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) advises the public to use reusable face masks and manage their trash at home. Many are now looking into the potential of locally-grown fibers as the best

way to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus, and minimize the number of face masks that go into landfills.

*Manila Bulletin Lifestyle* chats with **Jet Tabuzo** of Tandu.ph and **Joanna Suarez** of Mimi + Lipi about the benefits of using face masks made of Philippine fibers, and how they are not just good for the environment but for local artisans as well.

## **ABACA FACE MASK**

A study by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) shows that a face mask made of *abaca* is more water resistant than a commercial N-95, thanks to its pore size that ranges from 10 to 70µm.

*Abaca*, a fiber that comes from the Manila hemp plant, is handloomed into various indigenous textiles such as the *t'nalak*, *nipis*, and *sinamay*. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the Philippines is the largest producer of *abaca* in the world, with the majority of the supply from Catanduanes Island in the Bicol Region.

Catanduanes-based business Tandu.ph is among the many brands that are now manufacturing *abaca*-made face masks, not only to let everyone know the island's prime produce's protection capabilities, but also to help its people make a living while the pandemic is ongoing.

"*Abaca* fiber is commonly used for filtration. It is generally a hypoallergenic material. This is the reason why it is the perfect raw material for face masks and protective gear," Tabuzo says. "Our masks are handmade by the artisans of Catanduanes. We also partnered with a local designer, **Tyra Toyado**, who designed our *abaca* face mask. In this crisis, we need to help each other out by buying local products in order to boost the country's economy. Your purchase doesn't only help fellow Filipinos, you also get a reliable product to keep you safe."

## **BURI FACE MASK**

We may not know much about *buri*, but we have certainly seen it in many local merchandise. *Buri* is a kind of palm tree that is commonly cultivated in Quezon Province. Its leaves are woven into wearable items and other products such as *banig* and *tampipi*.

Mimi + Lipi, an enterprise that celebrates the works of the women weavers of Quezon Province, produced what they claimed to be the first ever face masks made of *buri*.

“These masks are a marriage of fashion and functionality,” says Suarez. “These are general use masks that are not of medical grade, produced in close consultation and guidance with a medical professional who works at the frontlines in Manila.”

Apart from the *huri* fiber, the masks are also made of layers of washed neoprene and microfiber textiles, and are designed with pockets to add extra filters. Keeping in mind its green advocacy, Mimi + Lipi makes masks that are washable, packed in kraft boxes that are made of recycled materials.

“The heart of this endeavor is the welfare of our women weavers in Quezon Province. We are committed to providing income and livelihood for them, especially at this difficult time,” Suarez says. “The *huri* face mask speaks of innovation, creativity, and resilience. Personally, however, the masks are a reminder of our current health crisis. Let’s hope that there won’t be a long-term demand for these face masks, that the crisis ends soon.”

<https://mb.com.ph/2020/08/18/save-the-environment-with-these-face-masks-made-from-abaca-and-huri/>