The Thinning Process

The process and goals of thinning obviously resembles weeding in a garden. The activities include:

Step 1. Identification of Goals
Define what you want to accomplish. Do you want to frame a view? Do you want to allow more sunlight to certain areas? Do you want to have certain trees grow faster? Once you have the answers to these types of questions you will be better prepared to decide which trees should be removed.

Step 2. Identification of Trees
It is important to learn the different tree species and their characteristics. It is generally recommended to remove exotic trees and shrubs, such as ailanthus and honeysuckle, to improve and encourage the native forest trees to thrive. You may also want to learn the difference between the longer lived oak and hickory species and the shorter lived black locust and eastern red cedar species. Also, select trees which have poor form or poor health for removal.

Step 3. Removal of Trees
The decision to remove a particular tree depends mainly on the answers to the following questions:

1. Is the tree defective or an undesirable species according to your management goals in regard to wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, or other purposes?
2. Is the tree crowding a more desirable tree?

If the answer to either or both of these questions is “yes,” the tree is a likely candidate for removal.

However, care must be taken to avoid overcutting to the extent that the there are large holes in the canopy allowing too much sunlight to reach the ground encouraging rapid growth of weeds and destroying the feeling of being in a woods. Consulting a forester or arborist may be a good investment at this time.

Small trees and shrubs can be removed using handsaws.

Large trees will require a chainsaw. It is best to have a trained professional arborist or forestry worker perform this task for you. If you are not accustomed to working with power equipment you risk severely injuring yourself and others. Also, if you are not skilled at accurately felling trees, the tree may do more damage as it falls to the trees you want to save.
Step 4. Pruning
While not considered thinning, you may need to do some pruning on the trees that remain for a variety of reasons:
Low or broken branches may be a hazard along a trail or near a seating area. Broken branches caused by thinning operations should be corrected to prevent decay and disease from entering the tree.

Low limbs on large trees may need to be removed to enhance a view.

Again, you can easily prune small limbs from the ground with hand tools. Large limbs and limbs that require a ladder or climbing a tree should be left to experienced professionals.